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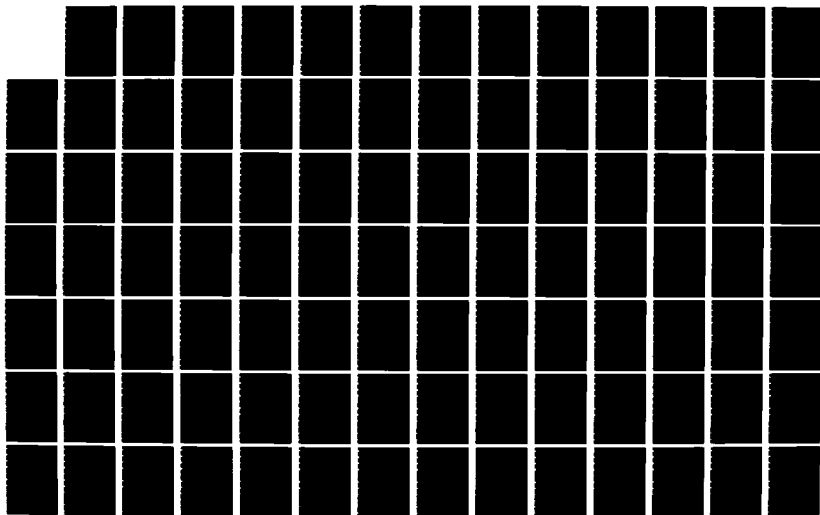
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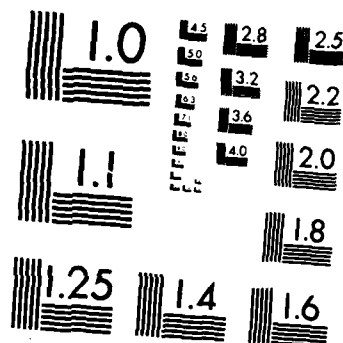
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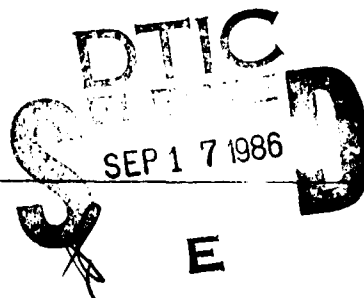
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John G. Albert  
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Trinity Term 1986



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## Note on Public Record Office Sources

1. The following abbreviations found in the footnotes followed by a number, a "/" and another number define records from the Public Record Office:

AIR	Air Ministry Records
CAB	Cabinet Office Records
CO	Colonial Office Records
DEFE	Ministry of Defence Records
DO	Dominions Office and subsequently the Commonwealth Relations Offices Records
FO	Foreign Office Records
PREM	Prime Ministers Records
WO	War Office Records

2. The system of the Cabinet and Chiefs of Staff Secretariat of listing governmental minutes and memoranda has been used. Thus COS(47)44th Mtg, Min 1 is the first minute considered at the forty-fourth meeting of the Chiefs of Staff Committee in 1947. COS(47)44 is the forty-fourth memorandum considered by the Chiefs of Staff in 1947. The following abbreviations found in the footnotes apply to meetings and memoranda in this manner:

APW	Armistice and Post-War Committee
CM	Cabinet Minutes
COS	Chiefs of Staff
CP	Cabinet Papers
CR	Commonwealth Relations Committee
DO	Defence Committee
DPM	Ministerial Committee on Preparations for the Meeting with Dominion Prime Ministers
IB	India and Burma Committee
JIC	Joint Intelligence Committee
JP	Joint Planning Staff
PMM	Prime Ministers Meeting
PWD	Post-War Defence Committee
SAC	China and South-East Asia Committee
WP	War Cabinet Papers

3. There are several idiosyncrasies in this system. The minutes of Cabinet meetings are referred to as "Conclusions". Of more importance, until 1949 Chiefs' of Staff memoranda were maintained in two separate series. The most sensitive documents were referred to as "(O)" series. Thus, COS(47)5 and COS(47)5(O) refer to two entirely different documents.

## Chapter 1: Introduction

For over two and one half decades historians of the British Empire have been trying to analyse the causes of Britain's imperial decline. This is not surprising. An empire that at the end of the Second World War still covered nearly a quarter of the earth's surface and embraced 600,000,000 people had all but disappeared less than two decades later. Initially great attention was focused on the role of colonial nationalists in the decolonization process. Typical of the early sixties view are such works as Rupert Emerson's From Empire to Nation and Stewart Easton's The Rise and Fall of Western Colonialism.<sup>1</sup> Particularly in the British case, however, the role of colonial nationalists did not seem to tell the whole story. The hunt for causes therefore turned back to the metropole. Various explanations were offered. The most common were economic weakness, a crisis in confidence, over-extended military commitments and a general wearing down caused by global competitors in two world wars and by the two superpowers thereafter. With this list in hand the game shifted to determining when the process of decline started. In reverse order the Suez crisis, the fall of Singapore, the Statute of Westminster, the Imperial Conference of 1926, the First World War, the Boer War and Britain's loss of industrial preponderance starting in the 1870s all found champions. It would seem that the second British Empire had been in imminent danger of collapse even before it had been

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1. Rupert Emerson, From Empire to Nation: The Rise to Self-Assertion of Asian and African Peoples, (Boston, 1960) and Stewart Easton, The Rise and Fall of Western Colonialism: A Historical Survey from the Early Nineteenth Century to the Present, (New York, 1964).

established.

To be sure various voices have been raised against an over-emphasis on decline. Jack Gallagher raised objections in his Ford Lectures in 1974, "The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire".<sup>2</sup> Gallagher argued that although decay had set in long before 1939, World War II marked a revival of the British world system and temporarily reversed its decline prior to its eventual collapse. John Darwin took the counter attack farther back in time with the publication of "Imperialism in Decline? Tendencies in British Imperial Policies between the Wars".<sup>3</sup> In this article he argued that political manoeuvring in Commonwealth and Imperial affairs in the interwar period represented less concessions to opposition than attempts to outmanoeuvre it.

The result of the Gallagher/Darwin counter-offensive to the "decline and decay" school has led to the general acknowledgement that there is no teleology to the end of empire. As D.A. Low has remarked, "The Whigs are dished".<sup>4</sup> The importance of stripping away the cloak of inevitability cannot be over-emphasized. So long as the end of empire is viewed as inevitable one can dismiss evidence that might tell a different or more complex story and there is certainly no call to look for such evidence.

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2. John Gallagher, The Decline, Revival and Fall of the British Empire: The Ford Lectures and other essays, (London, 1982).

3. The Historical Journal, Vol 23, No. 3, (1980) pp. 657-79.

4. D. A. Low, "The Contraction of England", An Inaugural lecture delivered before the University of Cambridge on 22 October 1984, (Cambridge, 1985), p. 11.

The absence of any need to look for new evidence has characterized previous interpretations of the impact of British defence planning on the end of empire. The Labour government's decision announced in January 1968 to withdraw British forces from east of Suez by 1971 supported the notion that Britain's global defence commitments were an anachronism. Books such as C. J. Bartlett's The Long Retreat and Phillip Darby's British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947 - 1968 focused on explaining why it had taken Britain so long to see the writing on the wall with respect to worldwide defence commitments.<sup>5</sup> In both cases British policy makers in the early post war years are portrayed as being captives of an imperialist mindset that no longer fitted reality. According to Darby:

The resistance to change was so deeply rooted that only a major reconsideration involving alike the services and the overseas policy departments, and with firm cabinet backing, could have launched Britain on a suitable post-imperial course. On the broader issue the Chiefs of Staff took no initiative, confining their attention to the problem of rebuilding an imperial strategy from what remained of the pre-war pieces.<sup>6</sup>

Both books are more useful as representations of the opinions of the late 1960s and early 1970s than in portraying the world as it appeared to British policy makers in the late 1940s. In fairness, both were written without access to government records. Also a distinction should be made between the two. Bartlett handles the evidence available with much greater finesse and does not make assertions that

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5. C. J. Bartlett, The Long Retreat: A Short History of British Defence Policy, 1945 - 70, (London 1972) and Phillip Darby, British Defence Policy East of Suez, 1947 - 1968, (London, 1973).

6. Darby, p. 16.

he cannot substantiate. Darby, however, is so captured by his thesis that he makes assertions that can now be proved false. His assertion that there was no global strategic review until 1951 is demonstrably false. The 1952 global strategy paper which he refers to<sup>7</sup> was at least the third overall statement on British global strategy given ministerial approval after the war. Another example is Darby's assertion that "Throughout, the transfer of power to India was the dominant concern and its sequel -- retraction of British power in the Indian ocean -- escaped attention".<sup>8</sup> While the first half of the statement would be accepted by most students of the subject, the second is not a consequence of the first and is not true. Darby's portrayal of the postwar Defence Committee and the Chiefs of Staff is also interpretive and subject to dispute. With certain exceptions as noted above with respect to Darby, however, the criticism of these works is not with the story they tell, but with the frame of reference from which they approach the subject. By offering an all encompassing interpretation based on decline they mask the need to examine the historical record in greater detail and to see the world as British policy makers in the early postwar years saw it. Failure to foresee the future is a facile criticism without an in depth knowledge of the evidence available for and the reasoning behind British global strategy.

Who was responsible for British postwar strategy? How was that strategy determined? What was the strategy? These are the basic questions that require answering. They are also questions that are

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7. Ibid. p. 16 and 46-8.

8. Ibid. p. 20.

largely defined away by Bartlett and Darby by arguing that Britain lacked a "realistic" strategy. Once these basic questions have been answered it will be possible to begin to analyse with greater authority such issues as Britain's role in the postwar world and the relationship of decolonization and the evolution to the Commonwealth to the development of Britain's postwar strategy.

For an accurate evaluation of British strategy in the years between VJ Day and the outbreak of the Korean War, it is essential to understand the world situation in which British policy makers and strategists made their decisions. While much play is made in the "decline and decay" school to Britain's economic weakness, and certainly Britain's economic position was difficult in the postwar years, this weakness needs to be seen in perspective. In 1951 Britain's productive capacity was still two and half times as large as that of France and fifty percent larger than that of West Germany.<sup>9</sup> The Soviet Union had also been devastated economically by the war. The main source of Soviet strength during this period was the large size of the Red Army. The marching radius of the Red Army and how to counter its preponderant strength was therefore the primary concern of British strategists throughout most of this period. The United States alone of the world's powers emerged from the war virtually unscathed, but the role it would play in this brave new world was initially unclear. Through June 1946, it was quite possible to see United States policy in terms of a return to isolation. By June 1946, American demobilization had far outstripped that of the United Kingdom. American willingness to commit itself to global security

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9. Bartlett, p. 64.



evolved only slowly and not in a linear progression. America viewed world trade as a means of securing its long term economic strength and avoiding a postwar depression. Still, a vast domestic market underpinned American economic strength. What sacrifices America would be willing to make to maintain world stability in the interest of world trade remained to be seen. For Britain, on the other hand, economic recovery depended upon her ability to increase her exports. An American loan afforded a grace period during which Britain could reorient her industries to meet the realities of the postwar world. An unstable world, however, would abort Britain's export oriented economic recovery. For Britain then, maintenance of a stable world order conducive to world trade became a necessity.

British policy makers attempted to solve this problem by constructing a global security system centred on the Commonwealth. Clement Attlee, the Prime Minister, and the Chiefs of Staff organization were the two primary forces behind this attempt. The means for creating this new Commonwealth security system and its ultimate shape evolved through time. At times there were significant differences between Attlee and his military advisers and among the military advisers themselves, but the ultimate goal was a stable world order that would be conducive to British interests. None of the main protagonists ever questioned the basic assumption that this world order should be based on the Commonwealth.

"Commonwealth defence" as used by Attlee and British military strategists was broadly synonymous with the protection of a British oriented global security system. It embraced more than the "constitutional" Commonwealth. Central to all planning for Commonwealth defence was co-operation with the United States. This

position was a natural outgrowth of wartime partnership. Both Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff were in total agreement that British postwar strategy hinged on the support of the United States. Nor was "Commonwealth defence" limited geographically to areas that would normally be associated with the British Empire/Commonwealth. After seventeen months of bitter debate, postwar Commonwealth defence came to be centred geographically on the Middle East. Commonwealth defence included guaranteeing access to critical resources and in this vein Latin America was tangentially incorporated. Five separate strands in this web of Commonwealth defence will be followed in the succeeding pages. These are: co-operation with the old dominions, integration of the colonial empire, co-operation with the United States, the attempt to accommodate what became the new South Asian dominions into its framework, and the role of the Middle East.

British attempts at creating this global security system were remarkably successful. By the outbreak of the Korean War military co-operation between the United Kingdom and the old dominions would be closer in peacetime than ever before. British strategic planning with the United States, again a first in peacetime, was a reality. Development and integration of the colonial empire into Britain's security system had made great strides. The new South Asian dominions were also substantially serving British interests. Only in the Middle East had British security interests failed to make any significant headway. How this all transpired is the story that follows.

## Chapter 2: Setting the Stage: Attlee, the Chiefs of Staff and the Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1944

To understand the development of British postwar strategy it is first important to understand the institutional setting in which it was created. Following the Second World War the Chiefs of Staff exercised greater influence on British policy than ever before in peacetime. The postwar strategy of the Chiefs of Staff centred on Commonwealth defence. Their concept of this strategy had initially been shaped by the 1944 Prime Ministers' Meeting. In their pursuit of Commonwealth defence the Chiefs of Staff enjoyed strong support from the Prime Minister, Clement Attlee. As we shall see, Attlee himself initiated the Chiefs of Staff quest for global security based upon the Commonwealth. The rise of the Chiefs of Staff, the impact of the 1944 Prime Ministers' Meeting and the views of Attlee thus provide the stage on which the development of postwar Commonwealth defence was enacted.

### The Wartime Revolution in British Strategic Planning Machinery

The machinery for British strategic planning had evolved steadily since the founding of the Committee of Imperial Defence (CID) in 1902. The CID was a sub-committee of the Cabinet. It had no executive authority. It derived its influence through its close connection with the Cabinet. This connection was strengthened after World War I as both institutions shared a common secretariat. In 1923 British

strategic planning machinery was strengthened with the establishment of the Chiefs of Staff Committee as a sub-committee of the CID. The Chiefs of Staff were commissioned to provide the government with advice on defence policy as a whole. The system was further refined with the founding of the Joint Planning Staff (JPS) in 1927. The JPS, comprised of the Directors of Plans of the three services, worked directly for the Chiefs of Staff. In 1936 it was strengthened by the appointment of deputy planners from each of the services and the provision of a whole-time secretary. The deputy planners were relieved of their departmental duties to devote all of their energies to joint planning. The first secretary of the JPS was the then Major L.C. Hollis of the Royal Marines who would become one of the linchpins in postwar strategic planning. Another refinement was the establishment of the Imperial Defence College (IDC) in 1927. It had the task of training a new generation of military leaders with horizons that extended beyond the confines of their own services. It also incorporated the training of dominion military leaders and British civil servants. Its goal was the creation of a closely integrated Commonwealth policy making elite. Finally, the Joint Intelligence Committee (JIC) was founded in 1936. This committee was chaired by a representative from the Foreign Office. Its purpose was to collate the intelligence gathered from both military and diplomatic sources to provide the Chiefs of Staff, the CID and ultimately the government with the best intelligence possible.<sup>1</sup>

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1. For a more detailed account of the evolution of British strategic planning machinery prior to World War II see F.A. Johnson, Defence by Committee, (London, 1960), Chap 1-8.

Thus the institutions which played a vital role in the restructuring of British strategy after the Second World War were largely in place before the war. Their effectiveness in shaping British policy in the interwar period, however, is a matter of considerable debate.<sup>2</sup> What is beyond debate is the impact that the war had in expanding the role played by the strategic planning machinery in the determination of overall British policy.

With the outbreak of war the CID was dissolved and replaced by the War Cabinet. The Chiefs of Staff and the other sub-committees of the CID were absorbed into the War Cabinet's machinery. The creation of the War Cabinet, endowed with extraordinary powers, effectively turned the British government into a constitutional dictatorship.<sup>3</sup> However, this was only the prelude to the actual revolution that the war brought to British strategic planning. With the fall of the Chamberlain government, Churchill not only became Prime Minister but also assumed the title of Minister of Defence. As Minister of Defence the Chiefs of Staff functioned directly under his supervision. In Churchill's own words, "Thus for the first time the Chiefs of Staff Committee assumed its due and proper place in direct daily contact with the executive Head of the Government . . .".<sup>4</sup> Churchill also

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2. For this debate see Johnson, Defence by Committee, chap. 11; N.H. Gibbs, Grand Strategy, Vol. I, Rearmament Policy, (London, 1976), chap. 20; and H.G. Welch, "The Origins and Development of the Chiefs of Staff Sub-committee of the Committee of Imperial Defence: 1923 - 1939", (Ph. D. Thesis, King's College London, 1973), pp. 358-74.

3. Johnson, Defence by Committee, p. 277.

4. W.S. Churchill, Their Finest Hour, (Cambridge, Mass., 1949) p. 18.

created the Defence Committee (Operations) and the Defence Committee (Supply). For purposes of strategic planning the Defence Committee (Operations) largely replaced the War Cabinet. The impact of Churchill's assumption of the title of Minister of Defence and the creation of the Defence Committee (Operations) is clearly spelled out by Lord Ismay in his memoirs. "It might seem on the face of of it that these two innovations made little change in existing arrangements; but the practical effects were revolutionary".<sup>5</sup> As time passed, however, Churchill came to rely less and less on the Defence Committee (Operations) for strategic planning and turned to a new creation of his own invention, the Staff Conference.<sup>6</sup> These Staff Conferences consisted of the Prime Minister and the Chiefs of Staff and whatever other ministers the Prime Minister chose to invite. The decisions taken at these Staff Conferences could have equally been made in the Defence Committee (Operations), but the ad hoc nature of the Staff Conferences gave the Prime Minister greater authority as he directly controlled attendance.<sup>7</sup> The end result was the steady elevation of the Chiefs of Staff Committee in British policy making machinery throughout the war.

The legacy of these wartime changes remained after the war. Like

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5. H.L. Ismay, The Memoirs of General Lord Ismay, (New York, 1960), p.160.

6. General Sir Ian Jacob explained Churchill's role as the inventor of this institution and its lack of constitutional precedent in a personal interview on 2 May 1985.

7. See John Ehrman, Grand Strategy, Vol. VI, (London, 1956), pp. 324-326.

Churchill, Attlee initially combined the positions of Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. Even after he relinquished the latter position to A.V. Alexander in December 1946, he continued to keep close tabs on defence issues. Unlike Churchill in the latter years of the war, Attlee placed great reliance on the Defence Committee, the successor to the Defence Committee (Operations). He chaired 129 of the 135 Defence Committee meetings between VJ Day and Korea. Legislation in October 1946 gave legal status to the replacement of the CID by the Defence Committee and also gave it executive authority which the CID had lacked. For the most sensitive strategic issues, however, Attlee followed Churchill's precedent of relying on Staff Conferences with the Chiefs of Staff. He convened thirty Staff Conferences with the Chiefs of Staff between VJ Day and the outbreak of the Korean War.<sup>8</sup>

The war also brought a quantum jump in the activity of the Chiefs of Staff Committee. Prior to the war the Chiefs of Staff Committee had met only 319 times in the 17 years between its creation and the start of World War II.<sup>9</sup> This is an average of less than nineteen meetings per year. In the years from 1931 to 1933 the Chiefs of Staff met less than 10 times a year. Such a low level of activity meant that the functioning of the committee could hardly have been at the centre of each of the service chief's attention. With the approach of war the

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8. COS(45)245th & 251st Mtgs; COS(46)49th, 76th, 78th, 108th, 139th, 161st & 165th Mtgs; COS(47)6th, 9th, 29th, 74th, 83rd, 90th, 95th, 139th, 144th, 150th & 158th Mtgs; COS(48)18th, 40th, 42nd, 79th, 96th, 100th, 136th, 169th & 182nd Mtgs; COS(49)69th Mtg.

9. All of the numbers of meetings prior to VJ Day listed in this paragraph are drawn from S.S. Wilson, The Cabinet Office to 1945, (London, 1975), pp. 174-5.

activity of the Chiefs of Staff Committee increased sharply. In the first 8 months of 1939 the Chiefs of Staff met 52 times. After war had been declared, they met 118 times in the last 4 months of the year. Thus the first four months of war brought a further increase of over 450 percent. Throughout the 6 years of the war the Chiefs of Staff averaged over 400 meeting per year.

The increase in the Chiefs of Staff Committees's activity in turn brought a shift in the priorities of each of the individual service chiefs. To put it bluntly they were forced to live with one another on a daily basis. This increased contact led to a natural altering of prewar attitudes towards inter-service co-operation. The heightened activity of six years of war insured that joint activity between the services at all levels would be significantly greater than it had been in the interwar era. The postwar figures confirm the institutionalization of the Chiefs of Staff. Between VJ Day and 25 June 1950 they met 916 times, or an average of over 180 meetings a year.

To cope with the increased wartime work load placed upon the Chiefs of Staff, the Vice Chiefs of Staff of each of the services were also combined in April 1940 to form the Vice Chiefs of Staff Committee. This committee was another innovation that remained after the war. The Vice Chiefs of Staff acted as surrogates for the Chiefs of Staff both individually and collectively. The minutes of their meetings were combined with those of the Chiefs by the secretariat. While the wartime intention was that the Vice Chiefs of Staff would handle the less weighty issues, at least in the postwar era this distinction became blurred and the Vice Chiefs of Staff generally



worked in close co-ordination with their Chiefs on all issues.

The war also enhanced the position of the secretariat serving the Prime Minister and the Chiefs of Staff. This secretariat was drawn from the prewar secretariat of the CID. One of the first changes wrought even before the downfall of the Chamberlain government was the elevation of its head, the Deputy Secretary (Military) to the War Cabinet, to membership on the Chiefs of Staff Committee. With the Churchillian reorganization, this position was given the title of Chief Staff Officer to the Minister of Defence. General Ismay became the first incumbent of this new position. In this position he handled co-ordination between the Prime Minister and the Chiefs of Staff and for both the Prime Minister and the Chiefs of Staff with the rest of Whitehall. This position made Ismay the central cog in the wartime administrative machine and his own integrity served to further elevate the position and make him in a sense the government's honest broker. If one had a special need or desire, Ismay was the logical person to contact on how best to proceed. The creation of the Combined Chiefs of Staff with the Americans forged yet another link in the chain of contacts that surrounded Ismay and the Chiefs of Staff secretariat. After the war Ismay continued to hold this position at Attlee's request until November 1946. Ismay's importance in postwar strategic planning sprung not only from his stature within the Whitehall machine, but also from the fact that he was a strong supporter of the Commonwealth ideal as will be seen shortly. Ismay was succeeded in this post by Lieutenant General L.C. Hollis whom we last encountered as the first secretary of the JPS. Hollis was one of Ismay's two lieutenants throughout the war and brought much the same stature and

ability to the job that Ismay had. In Whitehall after the war the Chief Staff Officer to the Minister of Defence and the Chiefs of Staff Secretariat had a reputation for being "first rate" and able to get things done.<sup>10</sup>

The war also increased the importance of the sub-committees of the Chiefs of Staff. The JPS took on a special importance. The Chiefs of Staff never successfully devised a means of separating long term strategy from the press of daily events. The result was an extremely crowded agenda. Therefore the JPS performed yeoman's service by providing plans that formed a basic strategic framework against which the Chiefs could react. The role of the joint planners as it had evolved during the war, and particularly the amount of freedom that they should be allowed in forming basic strategic appraisals, was to be an area of sharp disagreement between Field Marshal Montgomery and the other Chiefs of Staff after the war. The scope of wartime activities gave the joint planners wide horizons. Through joint planning staffs created to serve all of the major Allied Commands and the British Joint Staff Mission in Washington, the JPS in London was able to gather information on the progress of the war in all theatres in forming its own plans. The joint planners also co-ordinated their activities with other departments of the government, most notably the Foreign Office which maintained a representative on the JPS.<sup>11</sup>

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10. Sir William Hayter, A Double Life, (London, 1974), pp. 82-3 and expanded upon in a personal interview 2 October 1985.

11. Ehrman, Grand Strategy, pp. 328-32.

Indeed the Foreign Office seems to have made its own efforts to strengthen its ties with the whole of the strategic planning machinery. Foreign Office representatives attended Chiefs of Staff meetings periodically and a Foreign Office official continued to chair the Joint Intelligence Committee. The Foreign Office's most serious attempt to entwine foreign and defence policy, however, took place in the Post-Hostilities Planning Sub-Committee. This committee functioned under the JPS. A Foreign Office official, Mr. Gladwyn Jebb, chaired this committee from July 1943 to August 1944. The Foreign Office attempted to use this committee to put forward its own ideas for endorsement by the Chiefs of Staff. Thus the Foreign Office could get its ideas before the War Cabinet over the signatures of the Chiefs of Staff. This attempt was largely unsuccessful:

The diplomats' avowed intention to 'infiltrate' the C.O.S. machine and influence its planning in directions favoured by the Foreign Office could not hope to succeed on major issues when the Chiefs of Staff or their subordinates held strongly opposing opinions and the P.H.P.S. representatives accurately represented these in committee. All it could do was to secure concessions of a marginal nature, whilst leaving the Foreign Office chairman out on a limb.<sup>12</sup>

That the Foreign Office would go to such lengths gives a further indication of the importance of the Chiefs of Staff as a policy making body during the war. Ultimately, the close liaison established between the Foreign Office and the entire strategic planning apparatus became an important feature of postwar strategic planning.

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12. J. Lewis, "British Military Planning for Post-War Strategic Defence, 1942-1947", (Oxford D. Phil., 1981), pp. 115-6.

### Prime Minister's Meeting of 1944

In March of 1944, the strategic planning machinery first considered the role of the Commonwealth in British postwar strategic plans. The Chiefs of Staff were primarily concerned with winning the war and the impetus for the consideration of this aspect of postwar strategy came from the Ministerial Committee on Preparations for the Meeting with Dominion Prime Ministers. That committee met for the first time on 15 February 1944. It was chaired by Lord Cranborne the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. For that meeting Ernest Bevin, the Minister of Labour, had written a letter to Lord Cranborne advocating the Commonwealth as the central pillar for restructuring British world power. In his letter Bevin argued that it might be worth trying to make the British Empire into a single unit for defence even if it meant that, at least initially, Canada would opt out. Discussion of defence issues, however, was deferred by Lord Cranborne until the next meeting on 29 February. At this meeting Bevin expanded on his paper. "Generally, Mr. Bevin said that he, like General Smuts and Lord Halifax, was most anxious to ensure that the British Commonwealth should by acting as much as possible as a unit retain its position as a leading power". The committee decided to seek the advice of the Chiefs of Staff before making any decisions on this issue.<sup>13</sup>

The Vice Chiefs of Staff first addressed this issue at their

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13. DPM(44)2nd Mtg, Min 4, CAB 99/27. Bevin's letter can be found in the same file in DPM(44)3, Annex IV.

meeting on 6 March 1944. They agreed to take responsibility for the military planning required for the forthcoming meeting of Dominion Prime Ministers.<sup>14</sup> At their meeting on 9 March, Brigadier Jacob of the War Cabinet Secretariat presented a memorandum that neatly summarized Bevin's arguments:

Mr. Bevin points to self-preservation as being the first and strongest instinct, and suggests that if the British Empire could act as a unit for self-preservation purposes, trade, finance, and constitutional developments would flow from it. He considers that a system of regions or zones, which would enhance the sense of responsibility of the Dominions, would tend to facilitate the drawing together of the Empire. In the earlier part of this Paper, it was suggested that through obligations under a world system of security the desirability of close consultation and co-operation in defence matters would be brought home to those Dominions who would otherwise be reluctant to give up any part of their independence. Mr Bevin's idea might thus eventually be achieved by indirect means. It seems almost certain that a direct attempt to unify the Empire for defence would seriously antagonize Canada.<sup>15</sup>

As a result of Jacob's paper the Vice Chiefs instructed the Joint Planning Staff to prepare a paper for their consideration. This paper titled "The Co-ordination of Defence Policy within the British Commonwealth in Relation to a World System of Security"<sup>16</sup> was approved by the Vice Chiefs at their meeting on 30 March 1944<sup>17</sup> for submission

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14. COS(44)76th Mtg, Min 7, CAB 79/71.

15. COS(44)236(O), CAB 119/159, considered at COS(44)81st Mtg, Min 3, CAB 79/71.

16. JP(44)87(Final), 28 March 1944, CAB 84/62, circulated after the meeting as COS(44)58, 31 March 1944, AIR 8/997, presented to the Committee on Preparations for the Meeting of Dominion Prime Ministers as DPM(44)18, 7 April 1944, CAB 99/27, and finally to the Armistice and Postwar Committee also as DPM(44)18.

17. COS(44)105th Mtg, Min 4, CAB 79/72.

to Cranborne's committee. The paper criticized the lack of firm commitments by the dominion governments and hence any joint planning in the interwar period. It also argued that an international security system and a closely co-ordinated Imperial defence policy were not incompatible, particularly if both were organized on a regional basis. Finally, it put forward a number of proposals for bringing about closer defence co-operation within the Commonwealth. Among these proposals were the establishment of a Commonwealth secretariat; periodic meetings of Ministers of Defence and Chiefs of Staff; expanded exchange of military personnel, an expansion of the Imperial Defence College; standardization of organizations, training and equipment; and a study on industrial co-ordination.

The third meeting of Cranborne's committee took place on 12 April. At this meeting Lord Cranborne continued to express concern that emphasis on imperial defence rather than support for an international security organization might cause Canada to leave the Commonwealth. The committee decided to refer the issue to a new committee being set up under the Deputy Prime Minister, Mr. Attlee.<sup>18</sup>

This committee, The Armistice and Post War Committee, considered the paper at its first meeting on 22 April. In discussion it was pointed out that passages calling for the Commonwealth "to speak with a united voice" and citing the Combined Chiefs of Staff as the basis for future military co-operation were likely to be unpalatable to the dominions. It was explained that there was no intention of

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18. DPM(44)3rd Mtg, Min 1, CAB 99/27.

circulating the memorandum to dominion Prime Ministers. It was hoped that the paper would serve as a guide from which the British Prime Minister could lead discussion. On that basis the proposals at the end of the paper were approved as a brief for the Prime Minister.<sup>19</sup>

The Prime Ministers' Meeting began on 1 May. All dominion Prime Ministers attended except for Field Marshal Smuts of South Africa. Defence co-operation within the Commonwealth was not raised until the fourteenth meeting on the afternoon of 15 May. Mr. Attlee took the chair at this meeting in place of Mr. Churchill. Lord Cranborne made the opening statement arguing that whether or not a new world security system stood or failed would depend in large measure on the solidarity of the Commonwealth. He then listed for further discussion the proposals put forward in the Chiefs' of Staff paper. Mr. Mackenzie King, the Canadian Prime Minister, responded like a broken recording from the interwar Imperial Conferences. He said while there was much in what Lord Cranborne had said that the Canadian Cabinet would find valuable as a basis for consideration, "He was not in a position to express any opinion upon it until he had had an opportunity of discussing it with his colleagues." Mr. Curtin, the Australian Prime Minister, followed by reading a lengthy paper that, though paying lip service to imperial co-operation in general, primarily focused on improving Australian security in the South West Pacific. Mr. Fraser, the New Zealand Prime Minister, tabled a paper the tenor of which can be gathered from the first sentence. "It will be vital to the future security of the British Commonwealth of Nations that in the post-war

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19. APW(44)1st Mtg, Min 4, CAB 87/66.

period there should be the fullest co-operation between the members on questions of Imperial Defence". He also emphasized the need to bolster the CID after the war by incorporating the dominions on a regular basis. Mr. Attlee re-emphasized the idea of frequent meetings between Prime Ministers and other government officials and the benefit of personal contact in general. The meeting concluded by endorsing the Australian idea that the British Prime Minister should have monthly meetings with dominion High Commissioners. The hope was also expressed that after dominion Prime Ministers had returned to consult with their respective governments they would respond to the specific proposals just put forward.<sup>20</sup>

In terms of constructive results on defence co-operation, the 1944 Meeting of Prime Ministers was a failure. Nothing came of the proposals. The absence of Field Marshal Smuts and the noncommittal attitude of Mr. Mackenzie King had effectively prevented any effective decisions being made during the meeting and the press of wartime events prevented adequate follow up. This lack of success, however, became a prime consideration in the planning of the first Prime Ministers' Meeting after the war.

#### Attlee

The Labour electoral victory on 26 July 1945 meant that the planning for that conference took place under a new British Prime Minister, Clement Attlee. In the first five years of Attlee's premiership, Commonwealth co-operation, particularly in military

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20. PMM(44)14th Mtg, Min 2, CAB 99/28.



affairs, became greater than at any previous time. This is not a mere coincidence. Certainly the heating up of the Cold War after 1948 was a fortuitous backdrop, but part of the reason for the elevation of the Commonwealth as the core of a world security system must rest with Attlee himself. The connection between international order, the Commonwealth and defence was central to Attlee's political thinking, but seems to have been largely ignored. Kenneth Harris in his biography of Attlee uses the term "Commonwealth" only three times.<sup>21</sup> Trevor Burridge in the most recent biography of Attlee comes closer to identifying this issue. In his conclusion he says of Attlee:

He believed that British influence, if not power, still mattered in the world. He took a particular interest and pride in the Commonwealth as an example of how very different peoples could meet together to discuss subjects of mutual concern in an amicable and co-operative spirit.<sup>22</sup>

But he fails to identify the Commonwealth as an element in Attlee's thought before World War II and has little to say about it following the war. As an example he mentions neither the 1946 nor the 1948 Prime Ministers' Meetings.

There are a number of reasons why this side of Attlee's political orientation has not previously been noted. One is Attlee's own leadership style. He cultivated an unassuming personality. As a consummate politician he avoided taking exposed political positions unless he felt it was absolutely necessary. He was willing to let

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21. Kenneth Harris, Attlee, (London, 1982).

22. Trevor Burridge, Clement Attlee: A Political Biography, (London, 1985), p. 322

others make the running. As Attlee said in appreciation of Bevin's efforts as Foreign Secretary, "There's a lot in the proverb: 'If you've got a good dog you don't bark.'"<sup>23</sup> The result of Attlee's destylized leadership was that even those who worked with him often underestimated him. Churchill's famous quip, "Attlee is a modest man. And with reason".<sup>24</sup> and Dalton's comment, "And a little mouse shall lead them!"<sup>25</sup> referring to Attlee's selection as party leader in November 1935 are two examples. Another reason why Attlee's political beliefs have been poorly understood is his terseness of expression. He took great pride in expressing himself in as few words as possible in both writing and speaking. W.H. Morris-Jones described the deflation of his spirits by an interview with Attlee when he was being recruited to join Mountbatten's staff for the transfer of power in India. He records, "The Prime Minister achieved this by no more than being his brisk, matter-of-fact self: led into the room by Cripps, I found the interview over once a couple of sentences had been uttered in dry, firm manner".<sup>26</sup> Too few words can have the effect of not giving the listener time to synchronize his own mental processes before the message has passed. Attlee's pregnant sentences could be stillborn for his audience. In sum, his laconic style of expression coupled with his lack of charisma and flamboyance has meant that

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23. Francis Williams, A Prime Minister Remembers, (London, 1961), p. 149.

24. John Bartlett, Familiar Quotations, (Boston, 1968), p. 925

25. Hugh Dalton, The Fateful Years, (London, 1957), p.82

26. W.H. Morris-Jones, "The Transfer of Power, 1947: A View from the Sidelines", Modern Asian Studies, Vol 16, No 1, 1981, p. 3.

little lasting attention has been paid either to what he said or what he wrote. Yet another reason for the lack of appreciation of Attlee's views on international order, the Commonwealth and defence is his political affiliation. Almost by definition socialists should be more interested in domestic than international affairs. What interest they have in international affairs is expected to be idealistic and not particularly coherent. In Attlee's own words, "In the past it was not uncommon for Socialists to direct their vision of the future mainly to a new state of society within these islands, and to dismiss with a few vague phrases on internationalism the relations of this country under the new regime to the outside world".<sup>27</sup> In the world of nation-state realpolitik views on the brotherhood of all mankind are often held at discount. Attlee's views in this area, however, were quite coherent successfully coupling socialist idealism and realpolitik.

Attlee set down his views in The Labour Party in Perspective<sup>28</sup> two years prior to the start of the Second World War. These ideas guided his policy as Prime Minister. Such continuity after the calamitous events that had intervened testifies to their sophistication and coherence. This continuity was noted during Attlee's premiership by the re-issue of this book as The Labour Party in Perspective - and Twelve Years After<sup>29</sup>. The only difference between these two books is the addition of a lengthy introduction in the

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27. C.R. Attlee, The Will and the Way to Socialism, (London, 1935) p. 85.

28. C.R. Attlee, The Labour Party in Perspective, (London, 1937).

29. C.R. Attlee, The Labour Party in Perspective - and Twelve Years After, (London, 1949).

latter by Francis Williams pointing out specific examples of the accomplishment of Attlee's prewar programme in his first four years as Prime Minister. Chapters eight, nine and ten deal with foreign policy, the empire and Commonwealth, and defence respectively.

Attlee's views on world order gave special precedence to the role of Great Britain. Historically he argued, "Her situation made it impossible that she should desire war, and therefore the British Fleet might be regarded rather as a police force in the interests of the world rather than as a potential menace to other nations".<sup>30</sup> He saw Labour's foreign policy following the tradition of Palmerston, championing liberty against tyranny. He endorsed the Party stance of rejecting the balance of power and the use of force as an instrument of power, but then went on to sharply differentiate himself from the pacifists. "They support a police force but reject an army. To my mind this is illogical. The amount of force necessary to enforce the will of the community is conditioned by the forces that are in opposition".<sup>31</sup> He added, "If the forces of tyranny are prepared to take risks, and know that the forces of liberty are not, liberty will not long survive".<sup>32</sup> Such statements made at the time of the rise of fascism in Europe are equally consistent with Attlee's actions in the cold war. His ultimate aim was a world order based on effective collective security. In this vein he viewed the League of Nations "as a world commonwealth in embryo".<sup>33</sup> The use of the term "world

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30. Attlee, The Labour Party in Perspective, p.201.

31. Ibid. pp. 215-216.

32. Ibid. p. 217.

33. Ibid. p. 226.

commonwealth" is significant for it sheds light on Attlee's view of the role of the British Commonwealth.

Attlee saw the Commonwealth as a means of transforming the legacy of a capitalist empire. He bridled at the Conservatives seeing themselves as the special champions of empire. "Conservatism estranged Ireland, would have lost South Africa but for its removal from power at a critical time, and may yet lose India".<sup>34</sup> But he did not believe that an empire built upon sea power could be defended in the modern world if it chose to exclude others from the resources contained within it. To preserve the beneficial aspects of the British Empire a new approach was required. Co-operation between Great Britain and the dominions should set an example for the rest of the world. "The Labour Party believes in the closest possible co-operation between these countries, not in order to build up an exclusive block against the rest of the world, but to show the way of advance to the world".<sup>35</sup> Defence co-operation within the Commonwealth should be framed in terms of a commitment to collective security under the League of Nations.

With respect to the colonial empire, Attlee stated, "The aim of Labour's policy will be to fit the natives to control their own affairs and to achieve self-government".<sup>36</sup> The colonies should be developed economically to raise the standard of living of the indigenous population and to provide raw materials for all

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34. Ibid. p. 233.

35. Ibid. p. 234.

36. Ibid. p. 243.

industrialized nations.

In order to give full effect to the principle of trusteeship the British Government should accept the mandatory principle for all British colonial possessions. . . . It would necessarily follow from this that there would be an open door for all nations and an abandonment of the attempt to extend the principles of the Ottawa agreements.<sup>37</sup>

But Attlee's idealism for collective security and trusteeship did not blind him to the basic realities of world power. "The defence of Great Britain, the British Commonwealth, and the British Empire against external attack is a duty of Government, whatever may be its political complexion".<sup>38</sup> Socialists with their emphasis on group effort might even prove more effective in modern war as "Defence also demands the mobilisation of the economic resources of the whole country".<sup>39</sup> He also took issue with Britain's current organization for defence. "The three Services are independent, and despite a certain amount of eyewash there has been no real strategical co-ordination".<sup>40</sup> To rectify this situation, "The first thing a Labour Government would have to do would be to break down the exclusiveness of the three Services and create a real Ministry of Defence and a defence staff trained to think in terms of three elements".<sup>41</sup> The changes recommended in the Defence White Paper on "Central Organisation for Defence"<sup>42</sup> in October 1946 closely parallel

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37. Ibid. p. 241.

38. Ibid. p. 251.

39. Ibid. p. 259.

40. Ibid. pp. 258-259.

41. Ibid. p. 259.

42. Cmd 6923.

many of Attlee's prewar recommendations.

The purpose of looking at Attlee's ideas from The Labour Party in Perspective is not to make him appear to have been omniscient or clairvoyant. His ideas on collective security certainly evolved with the passage of time. The important point is he had a relatively coherent world view carefully thought out well in advance of assuming supreme responsibility. That world view was an essential part of his socialism for without a stable world order it would be impossible to raise the standard of living of the British workingman. Within that world view he saw a central role for the British Commonwealth. His definition of that Commonwealth as we shall see shortly was much looser and more open than that normally espoused. He also saw the importance of an effective defence as a necessary underpinning for the world order he envisioned. He considered that British strategic planning had not been effective and part of his program would be to revise that defect. The comprehensiveness of Attlee's political thought must certainly have been a key asset when it came to passing a record volume of domestic legislation while at the same time dealing effectively with the volatile postwar world.

A comprehensive world view was not the only asset Attlee took with him to No. 10 Downing Street. He had gained invaluable experience in the workings of government in his five years as a member of the wartime coalition. From May 1940 when he led Labour into the wartime coalition, he was Churchill's deputy in the War Cabinet and the Defence Committee and chaired the Lord President's Committee which supervised the civil side of the war effort. He served as Deputy Prime Minister from February 1942 until the dissolution of the wartime

coalition. As number two, he was responsible for running Britain's war machine in Churchill's frequent absences and occasional illnesses. He was thoroughly familiar with the revolution that had taken place in British strategic planning machinery and used the system very effectively. General Brooke, the Chief of the Imperial General Staff (CIGS), noted in his diary on 15 December 1941 that the Cabinet and Defence Committee had been "run by Attlee very efficiently and quickly".<sup>43</sup> On Attlee's recommendation to the War Cabinet, the terms of reference of the Chiefs of Staff were expanded in November 1943.<sup>44</sup>

His participation in the wartime coalition added a large dose of realism that was to be a central part of his view of global strategy after the war. He became increasingly pessimistic in his view of the Soviet Union and Stalin's intentions after the war. In the debate between the Chiefs of Staff and Foreign Office over the attitude that Britain should adopt towards the Soviet Union, Attlee sided with the Chiefs of Staff.<sup>45</sup> He also saw the importance and dangers inherent in the rise of American power for the Commonwealth.

If the United States is willing to join in policing Europe, I do not anticipate Dominion objection to any settlement on which the United Kingdom and the United States agree. If the United States will not provide a due part of the force necessary to uphold the settlement in Europe, the European Allies would presumably look to us to

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43. Arthur Bryant, The Turn of the Tide 1939 - 1943, (London, 1957), p. 285. See also similar entries from Brooke's diary for 4 August 1944 and 14 March 1945 in Arthur Bryant, Triumph in the West, (London, 1959), pp. 251, 428.

44. Harris, Attlee, p. 211.

45. Ibid. p. 213.



maintain it, and we should have to leave the United States to look after the East. The effects would be, firstly, that the international position of the Dominions would be weakened in their Regions, since they could only count on something less than full military support from us, and, secondly, that the increased reliance which they would be led to place on the United States might have a disruptive effect on the British Commonwealth.<sup>46</sup>

Attlee penned this Memorandum while serving as the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs. In this position which he held from 12 February 1942 till 28 September 1943, he gained first hand experience in Commonwealth affairs. The wartime evolution of his ideas on the Commonwealth are characterized in a memorandum which he presented to the War Cabinet on "The Relations of the British Commonwealth to the Post-War International Political Organisation":

I take it to be a fundamental assumption that, whatever post-war international political organisation is established, it will be our aim to maintain the British Commonwealth as an international entity, recognised as such by foreign countries, in particular by the United States and the Soviet Union. If we are to carry our full weight in the post-war world with the United States and the U.S.S.R., it can only be as a united British Commonwealth.<sup>47</sup>

Even before his appointment as Dominions Secretary, Attlee had made his personal views on the Commonwealth felt in the War Cabinet. In his appeal for what became the Cripps Mission, Attlee had written "Lord Durham saved Canada to the British Empire. We need someone to do for India what Lord Durham did for Canada".<sup>48</sup>

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46. WP(43)321, 19 July 1943, CAB 66/39.

47. WP(43)244, 15 June 1943, CAB 66/37.

48. WP(42)59 in N. Mansergh and E.W.B. Lumby, ed. The Transfer of Power, 1942-7, Vol I, (London, 1970), p. 112. Afterwards listed as T.O.P.

In his position in support of the Cripps mission, Attlee espoused the concept of a multiracial Commonwealth. This was an ideal that he would continue to battle for as Prime Minister. He defined his position clearly at a speech in Carmarthen on 3 September 1943.<sup>49</sup> He told his audience, ". . . I believe that by studying the British Commonwealth and Empire we may learn lessons valuable for the future of mankind". Among the lessons to be learned was ". . . how to live together without attempting to exact regimented uniformity". He noted that progress towards self-government depended on the homogeneity of the population or the ability of the different races to work together. The greatest obstacle to self-government within the empire was the difficulty of achieving the latter. He cited India as an example. He explained, "We have long ago given up the idea that we should enrich ourselves at the expense of our overseas possessions, but we have to do more than this. We have to pursue a positive policy of raising the standard of life throughout the British Empire". He continued, "Quite naturally the yellow, brown and black races will increasingly ask why they should be permanently kept at a lower living standard. We who have fellow citizens of so many different races must be concerned to remove inequalities which may lead to       fe". His concept of the indigenous members of the dependent empire as fellow citizens bore fruit in the expansion of the Commonwealth with the addition of the South Asian dominions under his premiership.

Thus, while Labour's electoral victory in July 1945 may have resulted from a desire by the electorate for reform at home, Britain's

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49. Attlee Papers, Bodleian Library, Box 10, pp. 11-29.

position in the postwar world order would not suffer from ignorance or indifference in the highest office in the land. Attlee brought to that job a well thought out view of Britain's role in the world coupled with five years of intimate experience at the centre of British government. He also had under his control more capable strategic planning machinery than any previous peacetime British Prime Minister. He was fully alive to the revolution that had taken place in British policy making as a result of the war. He relied heavily on the Chiefs of Staff in implementing much of his postwar strategy for preserving Britain's position of world leadership.

### Chapter 3: The Opening Round: September 1945 - May 1946

The new Labour Government could not long avoid addressing the issue of Britain's role in the postwar world. Attlee returned to the Potsdam Conference on 28 July in his new role as Prime Minister. He had with him Ernest Bevin, the new Foreign Secretary. Bevin was to be Attlee's staunchest ally in the Labour government in the crucial first five years after the war. When Bevin arrived at Potsdam, he told General Ismay, "I'm not going to have Britain barged about".<sup>1</sup> Attlee had found a good dog. Attlee's concept of loyalty did not encompass the stifling of opposing opinions, though, and in this regard Bevin occasionally disagreed with Attlee over the tactics that Britain should adopt in attempting to carve out its own position in this brave new world. When the Labour government's debate over postwar strategy began, Attlee and Bevin found themselves in just such disagreement.

#### Row over the Middle East

The Middle East provided the initial stimulus for the postwar debate on the restructuring British strategy. On 30 August 1945 the Cabinet considered whether, "to continue to assert our political predominance in the Middle East and our over-riding responsibility for its defence . . .".<sup>2</sup> On the same day the issue was raised at the Overseas Reconstruction Committee in the slightly different context of

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1. Ismay, Memoirs, p. 403.

2. CM(45)24th Conclusions, Min 2, CAB 128/1.

discussing the future of the former Italian colonies. Attlee was obviously displeased with the shape that this debate took. On 1 September he penned his own memorandum on this issue:

At the back of all the argument is the idea of the defence of the British Empire leading to conclusions as to the importance of our retaining control of strategic areas in the Middle East.

Quite apart from the advent of the atomic bomb which should affect all considerations of strategic area, the British Commonwealth and Empire is not a unit that can be defended by itself. It was the creation of sea power. With the advent of air warfare the conditions which made it possible to defend a string of possessions scattered over five continents by means of a Fleet based on island fortresses have gone. . . .

The British Empire can only be defended by its membership of the United Nations Organisation. If we do not accept this, we had better say so. If we do accept this we should seek to make it effective and not at the same time act on outworn conceptions. If the new organisation is a reality, it does not matter who holds Cyrenaica or Somalia or controls the Suez Canal. If it is not a reality we had better be thinking of the defence of England, for unless we can protect the home country no strategic positions elsewhere will avail.<sup>3</sup>

This memorandum is important for several reasons. For one it shows clearly the continuity between Attlee's ideas as expressed in The Labour Party in Perspective and those he initially espoused as Prime Minister. This memorandum provides a bench-mark for following the subsequent evolution of Attlee's ideas. It also provided the opening salvo in a running battle between Attlee on the one side and Bevin and the Chiefs of Staff on the other over the strategic importance of the Middle East. The battle was joined at the Cabinet meeting on 3 September, but all decisions were deferred.<sup>4</sup>

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3. CP(45)144, CAB 129/1.

4. CM(45)27th Conclusions, Min 1, CAB 128/1.

Bevin launched the initial counterattack on Attlee's position. On 11 September he presented his own paper on this issue to the Cabinet.<sup>5</sup> In rebutting the Prime Minister Bevin stated:

The security of the route through the Mediterranean and Middle East is vital to the security of the British Empire. . . .

In view of our strategic interest in this area, which remains as vital with the advent of air power as it ever was before, we cannot disinterest ourselves from the arrangements made in these ex-Italian territories, and, in order to reach arrangements which we can regard as satisfactory, it may in certain cases be necessary to accept direct responsibility and the consequential financial burden.<sup>6</sup>

Again, Cabinet discussion failed to reach any clear conclusions, but the meeting did bring the Chiefs of Staff into the debate asking that they review the security aspects of the problem. On 13 September the Chiefs of Staff referred the problem to the Joint Planning Staff. On the fifteenth, the Chiefs of Staff endorsed a JPS report recommending that Britain maintain a predominant position in the Middle East.<sup>7</sup> That same day the Cabinet again considered the issue of trusteeship for Tripolitania with the Chiefs of Staff in attendance.<sup>8</sup> The results of this discussion appear to again have been inconclusive for Bevin presented another paper on British policy in the Middle East to the Cabinet on 4 October.<sup>9</sup> The Chiefs of Staff were again in

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5. CM(45)30th Conclusions, Min 5, CAB 128/1.

6. CP(45)162, CAB 129/2.

7. JP(45)251(Final), CAB 86/75, considered at COS(45)225th Mtg, Min 1; CAB 79/39.

8. The records of this discussion are withheld in CAB 128/1.

9. CP(45)174, CAB 129/2, considered at CM(45)38th Conclusions, Min 6, CAB 128/1.

attendance. This paper proposed strengthening the British position in the Middle East and was endorsed by the Cabinet. Thus ended the first round in the debate between Attlee and his Foreign Secretary and military advisers with Attlee temporarily conceding.

Attlee returned to the attack on 22 February 1946 with a personal memorandum to the Chiefs of Staff criticizing their position on the Middle East.<sup>10</sup> Alan Bullock in his biography of Bevin refers to this paper as being "amongst the most radical produced by a British Prime Minister in office".<sup>11</sup> Attlee stated:

We must not for sentimental reasons based on the past, give hostages to fortune. It may be we shall have to consider the British Isles as an easterly extension of a strategic era [sic, area] the centre of which is the American Continent rather than as a Power looking eastwards through the Mediterranean to India and the East.

At their meeting on 25 February, the Chiefs of Staff considered that the sweeping nature of Attlee's proposals required an in depth study of the strategic position of the entire British Commonwealth and they referred this task to the JPS.<sup>12</sup>

Before the JPS completed their report the issue was raised by Bevin in the Defence Committee on 18 March in a discussion of the withdrawal of British troops from Cairo and Alexandria.<sup>13</sup> The Foreign

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10. COS(46)54(0), CAB 80/100, later presented to the Defence Committee as DO(46)27, CAB 131/2.

11. Alan Bullock, Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary, (London, 1984), p. 242.

12. COS(46)31st Mtg, Min 16, CAB 79/45.

13. DO(46)8th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/1.

Secretary cited the paper<sup>14</sup> that he had written in response to Attlee's memorandum. It was a wide ranging paper discussing many aspects of British postwar strategy. It again confirmed Bevin's commitment to the Mediterranean area as an important sphere of British influence, but its essence was the idea of moving Middle East Headquarters from Egypt to Kenya so that Britain's strategic requirements could be secured on British territory. The discussions of Bevin's paper was quite animated ending only when Attlee suggested that it would be appropriate to defer the broader questions raised by Bevin until the the Chiefs of Staff had had a chance to consider their reply.

The JPS response to Attlee's paper titled "Strategic Position of the British Commonwealth" came before the Chiefs of Staff on 29 March.<sup>15</sup> The report stated that in war the security of main support areas consisting of the United Kingdom, the American continent, Southern Africa and Australia was essential. Sea communications through the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian Oceans were of vital importance. British influence beyond these main support areas must also be maintained so as not to become involved in a war from a strategically unfavourable position. One of these important areas beyond the main support areas was the Middle East. The report stated that Russian dominance of areas outside the main support areas would deprive the United Kingdom of all bases from which to strike the enemy

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14. DO(46)40, CAB 131/2

15. JP(46)45(Final), CAB 84/79, discussed at COS(46)51st Mtg, Min 3, withheld CAB 79/46, but available in CAB 21/2086.



other than the United Kingdom. Maintaining British influence in these areas did not rest solely on a military presence, but could often be preserved by political or economic action. "It does not, therefore, follow that our strategical requirements as set out above result in the maintenance of large scale forces which it is quite clear the country cannot afford to maintain in peacetime". The report also strongly endorsed Bevin's conclusions in DO(46)40, particularly the idea that "From a political point of view our presence in the Mediterranean is vital to our position as a Great Power". Aside from requesting that the conclusions be put at the end rather than at the beginning, the main points raised by the Chiefs of Staff in discussion were the importance of the British position in the Middle East as a means of providing defence in depth, the importance of the Mediterranean route, the importance of India either in or out of the Commonwealth, and the importance of oil supplies.

These changes were incorporated in the revised paper presented to the Defence Committee as DO(46)47 on 5 April.<sup>16</sup> Attlee led a very reasoned attack against the Chiefs' of Staff position. His concern was that Britain lacked the strength to secure "protective zones" in Western Europe, the western Mediterranean and the Middle East. "In his (the Prime Minister's) view it was very doubtful if we could provide the forces on such a scale as would be necessary to support a 'forward' policy in the Mediterranean and Middle East". Lord Tedder, Chief of the Air Staff, responded that "it was essential that we possessed bases in the protective zones . . . ". Referring to the Middle East, he continued, "The first reinforcement we should receive

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16. DO(46)47, CAB 131/2 considered in DO(46)8th Mtg, Min 2, CAB 131/1.

from the Americans would be their heavy bomber force, but their use would be severely curtailed if we lacked the bases from which they could make their power felt immediately." Thus the Chiefs of Staff began a line of argument that they continued to pursue. Britain must be able to provide bases for strategic retaliation by the Americans in the event of war with the Soviet Union. The weakness in this argument at this time was that there was no joint planning with the United States and no guarantee of American support. Indeed American commitment to the United Kingdom had seemed to be decreasing since the end of the war. It was thus a strategy based upon a hope. Bevin followed up the arguments made by the Chiefs of Staff arguing the importance of the Middle East on political and economic grounds. He was supported by Lord Addison, the Secretary of State for the Dominions, who remarked at the small forces that the Chiefs of Staff said would be required in the Middle East. He commented, "In view of the manifest military and political advantages both in the event of war with Russia, and to our peace and war-time economy, he could see no reason for withdrawing our influence from the Mediterranean area". The Prime Minister summed up giving the report tentative approval for use at the forthcoming meeting of Dominion Prime Ministers while leaving a final decision open. For a second time Attlee had abandoned his attempt to initiate a British withdrawal from the Middle East.

One other event that served to focus the British strategic debate about the Middle East in the first ten months after the war was the renegotiation of the 1936 treaty with Egypt. The Chiefs of Staff first considered this issue on 27 December 1945.<sup>17</sup> In response to a query

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17. COS(45)289th Mtg, Min 5, CAB 79/42.

from the Foreign Office, they approved a JPS report endorsing the importance of the Egyptian base and proposals for handling the Egyptians as delicately as possible.<sup>18</sup> When Bevin outlined his proposals for treaty renegotiation to the Cabinet on 22 January the Chiefs of Staff were present.<sup>19</sup> As they had been consulted in the preparation of Bevin's memorandum, CP(46)17, they offered no further comment. The Chiefs of Staff continued to keep an eye on potential unrest in Egypt through February and March. On 13 March they approved Bevin's proposal to withdraw British forces from Alexandria and Cairo.<sup>20</sup> On 22 March the Chiefs of Staff approved a JPS report agreeing to a proposal to try to secure British rights in the Canal Zone by a ninety-nine year lease.<sup>21</sup>

One of the central issues was the location of the British military headquarters in the Middle East. As already noted, Bevin advocated moving as much as possible of the British military establishment out of Egypt to Kenya. In private the Chiefs of Staff were openly hostile to the idea.<sup>22</sup> Lord Alanbrooke, the CIGS, said "the general headquarters could not operate from as far afield as East Africa". Vice Admiral Sir Roderick McGrigor, the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, pointed out that such a headquarters could have no

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18. JP(45)300(Final), CAB 84/77.

19. CM(46)7th Conclusions, Min 5, CAB 128/5.

20. COS(46)39th Mtg, Min 6, CAB 79/46.

21. JP(46)62(Final), CAB 84/79, considered at COS(46)45th Mtg, Min 9, CAB 79/46.

22. COS(46)51st Mtg, Min 4, 29 March 1946, CAB 79/46.

practical link with the Commander-in-Chief, Mediterranean. Lord Tedder said the the RAF had in the past found that "the local inhabitants could not be regarded as a source of skilled or semi-skilled labour". In public the Chiefs of Staff were more diplomatic. At the Defence Committee meeting on 18 March, Lord Alanbrooke had given a cautiously pessimistic response to this proposal.<sup>23</sup> At the Defence Committee meeting on 5 April, the Chiefs of Staff presented a paper giving their response to Bevin's proposal.<sup>24</sup> The paper concluded:

Depending principally upon the development of the situation in Palestine, it might be possible to locate one division, certain air forces and subsidiary base installations in East Africa, provided the financial and other implications of undertaking the necessary developments are accepted.

If the defence of the Middle East on a regional basis is to become a reality, it will not be possible to locate the main headquarters for the area as far afield as East Africa. The most suitable location would be the Canal Zone.

Attlee summed up in favour of establishing the nucleus for a Middle East headquarters in the Canal Zone while continuing to explore the possibility of building a base in East Africa for the Middle East's strategic reserve.

On 12 April the Chiefs of Staff approved Bevin's latest negotiating position for the revision of the Anglo/Egyptian Treaty with the exception of desiring to maintain a greater RAF presence.<sup>25</sup>

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23. DO(46)8th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/1.

24. DO(46)48, CAB 131/2, considered at DO(46)10th Mtg, Min 3, CAB 131/1.

25. JP(46)73(Final), CAB 84/80, considered at COS(46)59th Mtg, Min 4, CAB 79/47.

The withdrawal of all combat forces was one of Bevin's five proposals and the Chiefs of Staff stressed the weakness of Egypt's air defences in making this exception. The Defence Committee endorsed the Chiefs' of Staff reservation on 15 April.<sup>26</sup> The same day, however, when Lord Stansgate leading the British negotiating team arrived in Cairo, he was greeted by an Egyptian demand for a promise of the total withdrawal of all British forces as a precondition for negotiations. When the Chiefs of Staff considered this demand on 18 April, they rebelled.

We conclude that anything less than the reduced requirements to which we had previously agreed is unacceptable from a military point of view.

Since the attainment of these requirements would depend, under the latest proposals, on a gamble on Egypt's goodwill, we are of the opinion that the risk is too great to take.<sup>27</sup>

Nor were the Chiefs of Staff alone in this attitude. On 24 April Sir Orme Sargent, the Permanent Under-Secretary in the Foreign Office, wrote: "The Egyptians cannot have it both ways. They cannot expect us to ensure the safety and independence of Egypt unless they give us the facilities which will enable us when the time comes to take the necessary action".<sup>28</sup>

On the same day as Sargent wrote that minute, however, the Chiefs of Staff abruptly altered course. Major General Ian Jacob, the

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26. DO(46)12th Mtg, Min 2, CAB 131/1.

27. COS(46)63rd Mtg, Min 1, CAB 79/47.

28. Minute by Sargent, FO 371/53292, cited in Roger Louis, The British Empire in the Middle East 1945 - 1951: Arab Nationalism, the United States and Postwar Imperialism, (Oxford, 1984) p. 235.

military representative on the Stansgate mission had returned to London to report to the Chiefs of Staff.<sup>29</sup> After a lengthy discussion, the Chiefs of Staff concluded that there appeared to be only two options. Britain could try to maintain her position by force or agree to complete withdrawal and hope for Egyptian goodwill in the future. The first option might require forces beyond Britain's current means, would undoubtedly destroy any remaining goodwill on the part of the Egyptians and would have an untold impact on world opinion. The second option seemed the lesser of two evils. At a second meeting at 2:45 p.m. the Chiefs of Staff approved a draft minute recommending the latter course for submission to the Defence Committee.<sup>30</sup> When the Defence Committee met at 3:00 p.m., General Jacob gave a detailed description of the current situation in Egypt.<sup>31</sup> He restated the delegation conviction that a refusal to concede the withdrawal of all British forces as a precondition to negotiations would lead to large scale unrest, the ultimate outcome of which was uncertain. The Defence Committee approved the Chiefs of Staff recommendation. At 5:00 p.m., the Cabinet also gave approval for the Foreign Secretary to concede the Egyptian demand. The Cabinet hoped that five years would be allowed for this task to be accomplished.<sup>32</sup>

The events of 24 April 1946 are significant for several reasons. They lend an important insight into the working of the Chiefs of Staff

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29. COS(46)64th Mtg, Min 9, CAB 79/47.

30. COS(46)65th Mtg, Min 1, Ibid.

31. DO(46)14th Mtg, Min 2, CAB 131/1.

32. CM(46)37th Conclusions, Min 1, CAB 128/5.

Committee. Faced with the appraisal of a trusted colleague,<sup>33</sup> the Chiefs of Staff were not above reversing their previous position. They not only reversed themselves, but were then willing to play a key role in implementing the policy that they had previously opposed. That the Chiefs of Staff Committee was capable of leading government policy reflects its importance in governmental policy making. That it was also willing to reverse itself based on new information shows that as an institution it was far from hidebound. The events of 24 April also give valuable insight into the working of the postwar Labour government. Criticisms voiced both at the time by the opposition and recently by Roger Louis in The British Empire in the Middle East 1945 - 1951<sup>34</sup> that this policy was ill-conceived and based on the over-confidence of inexperienced Labour politicians are wide of the mark. Britain's military advisers certainly were not imbued with any socialist exuberance that might mask the realities of power. Indeed, Lord Alanbrooke had recorded in his diary the previous September after Attlee's first assault on Middle East strategy:

We were shaken by Attlee's new Cabinet paper in which apparently the security of the Middle East must rest on the power of the United Nations; we have had enough experience in the League of Nations to be quite clear that, whilst backing this essential and idealistic organization, something more practical is also required.<sup>35</sup>

The point is that the Chiefs of Staff had concluded that it was

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33. General Jacob had been General Ismay's other deputy, with General Hollis, during the war.

34. Louis, The British Empire in the Middle East p. 237.

35. Bryant, Triumph in the West, p. 491. This comment refers to CP(45)144 cited above.

doubtful that they could muster sufficient force to deal with a complete breakdown of order in Egypt and that eventuality appeared likely in the absence of a change in policy. It also may explain Bevin's and Attlee's failure to respond to Churchill's taunts in parliament on this issue.<sup>36</sup> One would hardly expect them to rise and say that according to the Chiefs of Staff they had not the force to cope. Most importantly, this issue brings clearly into focus the symbiotic relationship between Labour's socialist ideology and the realities of postwar British power. Facing antagonistic nationalism with over-stretched resources, the socialist concepts of equality and partnership offered a possible solution other than confrontation or retreat. Even the hard headed realists on the Chiefs of Staff Committee thought this solution worth the gamble.

From this opening round of the debate on the Middle East, the centrality of this region in Britain's postwar strategic calculus had become apparent. The Chiefs of Staff argued that the region was essential to give the Commonwealth defence in depth and as a location for air bases from which to strike back at the Soviet Union. Lines of communication through the region, though not vital, were of great importance when considering overall shipping requirements. Bevin argued that British influence in the area was vital politically and economically. If Britain moved out, the Soviet Union would move in. He doubted if Britain could maintain her status as a great power if she withdrew from the region. Economically, he argued that the

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36. Louis, The British Empire in the Middle East, p. 239.



Mediterranean and the Middle East was worth a million to one and a half million jobs to the United Kingdom.<sup>37</sup> Thus the westward shift in Britain's imperial centre of gravity that characterized the period between VJ Day and the Korean War was already in motion.

#### India: A New Role?

Although only dimly seen in the first ten months after the war, this westward shift in British strategic interests would also alter the position of India in Commonwealth strategy. Historically, India had been the eastern pillar of British world power. It had served as 'an English barrack in an oriental sea'. Its possession had made Britain an Asian power. From a Curzonian point of view, "as long as we rule India, we are the greatest power in the world. If we lose it, we shall drop straight away to a third-rate Power".<sup>38</sup> There could be no doubt, however, after the Cripps Mission in 1942 that Britain's relationship with India would undergo some form of change after the war. The question to be answered was how this change would square with Britain's position as a world power. How was a new status for India, whatever it might be, to be woven into British strategic calculations?

In the first months after the war the Chiefs of Staff had devoted little thought to this issue. Alanbrooke had put forward some rough proposals for regional security in South Asia during his trip to the Far East in November 1945, but in committee Indian affairs captured

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37. DO(46)8th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/1.

38. David Dilks, Curzon in India, Vol 1, Achievement, (London, 1969), p. 113.

the Chiefs' of Staff attention only when considering the use of Indian forces outside of India or the internal security of the subcontinent. This situation changed with the approaching departure of the Cabinet Mission in March 1946. On 1 March, Sir David Monteath, the Permanent Under-Secretary in the India Office, wrote a letter to General Ismay asking the Chiefs of Staff to address a series of questions on future British defence requirements in India.<sup>39</sup> The purpose of the Chiefs' of Staff reply would be to provide a brief on defence issues for the members of the Cabinet Mission. In response to Monteath's letter the JPS prepared a report titled "India - Future Defence Requirements" which the Chiefs of Staff considered on 13 March.<sup>40</sup> The Chiefs of Staff approved the JPS report with some minor revisions. Drafted in letter form a copy was sent by General Hollis to Monteath the same day. In the letter the Chiefs of Staff stated:

The question of a change in the status of India and in our relations with India under treaty raises the widest issues which fundamentally affect our strategy.

. . .

The Chiefs of Staff assume that our primary political objective is to grant India independence, if possible within the British Commonwealth. It would seem to them, however, that unless this is done as a result of a freely negotiated agreement fully satisfactory to both sides, such an agreement could neither be effective nor lasting.

If this is accepted it follows that we cannot afford to allow the negotiations to break down and cannot therefore classify any of our needs as essential, if by this is meant that we would rather abandon the negotiations than modify our requirements.<sup>41</sup>

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39. Nicholas Mansergh and Penderel Moon, eds., T.O.P.. Vol. VI, (London, 1976) No. 486, pp. 1091-94.

40. JP(46)50(Final), CAB 84/79, considered at COS(46)39th Mtg, Min 1 CAB 79/46.

41. T.O.P. Vol. VI, No. 521, pp. 1066-7.

The Chiefs of Staff took the same positive vein in answering the five specific questions raised by the India Office. With regard to India's defence obligations, the Chiefs of Staff were primarily concerned that India assume responsibility for her own internal and external security. They would be willing to provide help in the form of officers and technicians. They were satisfied with any forces remaining in India being under Indian command provided that there was a British veto to guard against troops being used improperly. They stated that they had no plans for the continued stationing of a strategic reserve in India. Nor did they anticipate the need for Indian forces stationed outside India in British territory. The crux of the issue was that India provide forces required for her external defence to the maximum extent possible, since British manpower would be required to meet other commitments. Hollis closed the letter expressing the Chiefs' of Staff concern over the possible political division of India as this would greatly complicate the defence problem.

The tone of the entire letter expressed confidence in a fairly high degree of co-operation between an independent India and the United Kingdom. Thus, the Chiefs of Staff pitched their initial consideration of Indian independence and Commonwealth defence on the plane of high statesmanship. They anticipated that if undue requirements were not pressed upon India, Indians would naturally see the advantages of membership in or close alliance with the Commonwealth. One might wonder at the Chiefs' of Staff optimism, however, if the co-operation enjoyed with the old dominions immediately after the war was an example.

### Dominion Defence Co-operation

The most urgent problem confronting British policy makers at the end of the war in an attempt to develop a viable Commonwealth defence was obtaining the co-operation of the old dominions. Attlee personally initiated British action in this area, attempting to affect the ideas on Commonwealth unity that he had expressed as Dominions Secretary in 1943. He raised the issue with the Chiefs of Staff at a Staff Conference on 9 October 1945.<sup>42</sup> He accepted a suggestion that the topic of dominion co-operation should be considered by his Ad Hoc Committee enquiring into postwar defence organization.<sup>43</sup> He also endorsed the Chiefs' of Staff proposal to reopen the IDC as soon as possible with the possibility of inviting American students to be considered.

One week later, the Chiefs of Staff considered a paper drafted by Major General Jacob on the subject of "Imperial Co-operation in Defence".<sup>44</sup> This paper replied to the Prime Minister's query about what thought had been given to postwar dominion co-operation in defence. It recapitulated in detail the results of the Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1944. The paper pointed out that one of the dilemmas facing British strategists was that while Australia and New Zealand seemed willing to co-operate, Canada's co-operation was more important for Britain's own survival and Canada seemed particularly

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42. COS(45)245th Mtg, Min 3, CAB 79/40.

43. This Committee was the Post-War Defence Committee.

44. COS(45)614(0), AIR 8/997, discussed at COS(45)252th Mtg, Min 8, CAB 79/40.

reluctant to co-operate. After some revision the Chiefs of Staff endorsed the paper for submission to the Prime Minister as COS(45)625(0).<sup>45</sup> In its conclusion the revised paper proposed that all members of the Commonwealth should affirm their commitment to collective security, agree to review defence policy at periodic Imperial Conferences, that the Committee of Imperial Defence or its successor be established as the main co-ordinating body for Commonwealth defence, that joint defence plans and co-ordination of industrial potential should be agreed with lines of communication opened between Joint Planning Staffs in each of the dominion capitals and that the work of the IDC should be expanded.

As the Chiefs of Staff acknowledged these proposals were quite sweeping. On 22 October Lord Addison, the Secretary of State for Dominion Affairs, who had also received a copy of the Chiefs' of Staff paper, sent a memorandum to Attlee commenting on it.<sup>46</sup> He concurred with the paper's description of the Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1944 and then elaborated on the subsequent follow-up by the Dominions Office. In short, both Canada and South Africa had replied that they thought that discussions on future co-operation should be deferred until after the war. Lord Addison then advised that as centralized control of imperial defence had proven ineffective in the past, it might be more sensible to attempt co-ordination on a bilateral and regional basis. The stimulus of intruding American power that would

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45. AIR 8/997.

46. Memorandum attached to a covering minute dated 20 October 1945, PREM 8/21. The final form of this memorandum was presented to the Post-War Defence Committee as PWD(45)2, CAB 134/656.

become a major ingredient in the postwar British strategic cake also reared its head. Addison closed his memorandum warning: "The importance of securing at least this minimum degree of co-operation is emphasised by the reports recently received of U.S. approaches to Canada with the object of securing Canadian adoption of American in preference to British equipment".

The Post-War Defence Committee now became the centre of the debate on defence co-operation with the dominions.<sup>47</sup> This committee consisting of Attlee, Addison, and A.V. Alexander, the First Lord of the Admiralty, met for the first time on 24 October. For the evolution of postwar Commonwealth co-operation in defence, the papers submitted to it are of greater significance than its actual deliberations. PWD(45)2 was the memorandum from Lord Addison discussed above, and PWD(45)3 was COS(45)625(0). PWD(45)4 contained a six page appraisal of Canadian attitudes towards postwar co-operation in imperial defence by Malcolm Macdonald, the British High Commissioner in Canada. This paper rambles and tries to put a hopeful cast on future defence co-operation, but its most obvious message is that defence co-operation with Canada would be an extremely delicate matter. The picture is presented of the Canadian public not even supporting the limited defence objectives of the Canadian government. On 24 December Addison submitted PWD(45)9 dealing with the resurrection of the Committee of Imperial Defence. He argued strongly for the continuation of the wartime defence committee rather than the resurrection of the CID on the grounds:

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47. All minutes of meetings and papers submitted to the committee are in CAB 134/656.

. . . that one of the objectives of the original Committee of Imperial Defence was to secure co-operation with the Dominions by having Dominion representation on it. This was not effective in the case of Canada, at any rate for the last 20 years, and it is clear that the Canadian view on this has not changed. On the contrary the existence of a body of this kind which purports to deal with 'the Empire as a whole' might well impede, rather than promote, co-operation by Canada.

The problem of postwar defence co-operation with Canada became readily apparent at this time with the Canadian decision to pull all of its occupation forces out of Germany. The Chiefs of Staff considered the impact of this decision on 21 December.<sup>48</sup> They immediately decided to inform the Prime Minister of the consequences of this Canadian decision. Their inability to change the minds of the Canadian government on this issue boiled over in statements by both the CIGS and the Prime Minister.

Lord Alanbrooke said that he thought the Canadian view ought not to be accepted. If we acquiesced in the withdrawal of the Canadian Army, it would mean that they were not undertaking any commitment in any part of the world. This attitude seemed indefensible. It was also entirely out of line with the trend of thought in contributing to the United Nations security forces and the acceptance of commitments in support of the United Nations Organisation. Moreover, if the Canadians withdrew and thus shirked their responsibilities, they would thereby be throwing an extra proportion of the financial and manpower burden on those who remained to undertake the Empire share of occupation commitments throughout the world. This decision came at a particularly awkward moment for the British Government, as they were at the present time faced both exceptional man-power and financial difficulties.<sup>49</sup>

Two days after this statement by Alanbrooke, Attlee wrote Ismay on 18 January:

As far as I can see, we are to expect little or no

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48. COS(45)287th Mtg, Min 11, CAB 79/42.

49. COS(46)8th Mtg, Min 11, CAB 79/43.

assistance from the Dominions in meeting our many commitments. I propose to take this matter up personally with Dominion Governments, and I intend to see Dominion representatives who are now in this country. I would be glad if you would let me have at our meeting on Monday a statement of any forces that the Dominions are contributing in support of our various tasks, and your opinion of what it would be reasonable for me to ask them to provide by way of occupation forces or aid of various commitments by land, sea and air.<sup>50</sup>

In spite of telegrams from Attlee to Mackenzie King, and personal meetings between Attlee and Canadian ministers and between the British High Commissioner and Mackenzie King, Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff finally had to admit defeat over this issue on 15 February when the Canadian government formally announced its troop withdrawal plans.<sup>51</sup>

In the midst of this row over the withdrawal of Canadian occupation forces, Attlee proceeded with plans for calling a meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers. The note prepared for Attlee by the Dominions Office to announce his intentions to the Cabinet stressed the importance of defence issues and the desire to meet the Australian Prime Minister, J.B. Chifley, who had not previously visited the United Kingdom.<sup>52</sup> Attlee made the announcement at the Cabinet meeting on 31 January.<sup>53</sup> On 2 February he agreed to the despatch of telegrams to the various dominion Prime Ministers. On 13 February after

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50. D1/46, Minute from Attlee to Ismay for Chiefs of Staff, CAB 21/2277

51. In addition to sources previously listed see COS(46)1st Mtg, Min 11; 7th Mtg, Min 5; 11th Mtg, Min 12 and 12th Mtg, Min 9 all in CAB 79/43; JP(46)19(Final) "Canadian Occupation Forces" in CAB 84/78; and COS(46)20th Mtg, Min 6 and COS(46)26th Mtg, Min 8 in CAB 79/44.

52. Minute from Tory to Rowan, 30 January 1946, PREM 8/179.

53. CM(46)10th Conclusions, Min 1, CAB 128/5. The actual minutes of the meeting give no details of the Prime Minister's statement.



favourable replies from each of the dominions, another set of telegrams was despatched hoping to clinch the arrangements so that Attlee could announce the meeting in Parliament. At this point the arrangements came unraveled. Chifley replied that he had hoped that the meeting would start earlier and that he would have to leave by 4 or 5 May. Mackenzie King's reply said that he had not anticipated the meeting dates being so early and that he could not come before the end of May. Attlee then responded to both explaining that their two positions looked irreconcilable and asking for suggestions. Chifley's response contained the idea of a meeting held in two stages. He would attend the first. On 25 February Attlee agreed to adopt Chifley's solution. On 11 March the Dominions Office sent telegrams setting out the format of the meeting to be held in two stages.<sup>54</sup> The unique format of this meeting, which actually occurred in four stages afforded British policy makers the opportunity to stage manage which items were discussed with which Commonwealth Prime Ministers. The next task was therefore to set the agenda.

To deal with problems such as setting the agenda, Attlee agreed to follow the precedent set in preparing for the Prime Ministers' Meeting in 1944 of establishing a ministerial committee. On 3 April this committee with Addison as its chairman considered the proposed agenda and timetable for the the meeting.<sup>55</sup> During the first week of the meeting with Mr. Chifley and Dr. Evatt from Australia and Mr. Nash from New Zealand the main topic for discussion would be foreign policy

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54. The sequence described here can be traced in PREM 8/179.

55. DPM(46)3 considered at DPM(46)1st Mtg, Min 2, both in PREM 8/179.

in relation to the Pacific and Southeast Asia, the United States request for bases in the Pacific Islands and defence co-operation between the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. During the second week Field Marshal Smuts would join the others and the future of Italian colonies, trusteeship and defence would be the main topics. For the final week, Mr. Chifley would have departed and Mr. Mackenzie King would have arrived and the proposed topics were foreign policy, atomic energy and defence. This timetable was approved by the committee for submission to the Prime Minister. General Ismay explained that five papers were being prepared on defence issues for United Kingdom ministers. It was agreed that defence papers would be sent to the dominions by air if they were approved by the Defence Committee.

As we have already seen in following the debate over British strategy in the Middle East, the Defence Committee on 5 April approved the Chiefs' of Staff paper "Strategic Position of the British Commonwealth" for use at the Prime Ministers' Meeting.<sup>56</sup> At the same meeting, they also considered a Chiefs' of Staff paper titled "Organisation of Zones of Strategic Responsibility".<sup>57</sup> This paper proposed four zones of strategic responsibility: the Middle East, India, Southeast Asia and Australasia. These zones neatly divided the areas where Britain had strategic interests and it was hoped that the dominions might be induced to co-operate in specific zones. Lord Alanbrooke said that the Chiefs of Staff were also considering ways to

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56. See pp. 37-9 above.

57. DO(46)46, CAB 131/2, considered at DO(46)10th Mtg, Min 4, CAB 131/1.

include Canada in Commonwealth defence commitments, possibly in the West Indies. While the Committee endorsed the report, it was not a very well thought out document. Sir Edward Bridges pointed out that civil and political problems in the areas concerned did not coincide with these strategic defence zones. The Chiefs of Staff themselves would have continuing disagreements in the ensuing years trying to sort out specific areas of responsibility between overseas commands. The importance of the document is that it marks another step along the path towards regional defence that would be the cornerstone of the Chiefs' of Staff attempt to formulate a comprehensive system of Commonwealth defence.

After the meeting on 5 April, the Defence Committee played an insignificant part in further preparations for the Prime Ministers' Meeting. Preparations were continued by the Dominions Office, the Chiefs of Staff and Attlee in his dual role as Prime Minister and Minister of Defence. Responding to a New Zealand telegram on 6 April enquiring whether military advisers should be brought, the Dominions Office replied:

We certainly had in mind that discussions on Defence questions with Australia and New Zealand should be as full and comprehensive as time and circumstances will permit. Chiefs of Staff have in preparation some papers on general strategical issues and suggestions for co-operation which we hope to circulate before the meeting. If in the circumstances you should decide to bring your military advisers we should be very happy to see them.

Please repeat your telegram and this reply immediately to Prime Minister of Australia.<sup>58</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff continued to devote time to preparing and revising

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58. Both telegrams dated 6 April 1946, PREM 8/179.

the papers that they hoped to present at the Prime Ministers' Meeting.<sup>59</sup> The most difficult task, though, of dealing with dominion Prime Ministers fell to Attlee. Holding them to the line that the British government wanted to follow in the meetings required both tact and strength on Attlee's part. On 20 April Chifley in a letter to Attlee questioned the need to discuss the strategic position of the British Commonwealth as a whole. Attlee replied firmly:

I should have thought myself that a broad survey of the general problem of defence would be a useful introduction to the consideration of the specific problem of regional Security in the Pacific.

It would, I think, be advantageous to have in our minds the responsibilities of all the members of the Commonwealth throughout the world before coming to a particular problem.<sup>60</sup>

Yet by far the most difficult of his Commonwealth colleagues for Attlee to handle was Mackenzie King. The final event in a long series of difficulties with the Canadian Prime Minister occurred after the ending of the first two stages of the meeting when Mackenzie King became aware of the tactics that Attlee and the British government had adopted. He responded irately:

Your message of 7th May and the record of the proceedings which have so far taken place and which I have just seen for the first time represent however a conception of the purpose and method of procedure so different from what I have been led to understand were the purpose and nature of the consultations to be held in London that I feel I should let you know at once how completely they differ from anything I have either understood or anticipated. . . .

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59. See COS(46)55th Mtg, Min 18, 8 April; 56th Mtg, Min 8, 10 April; 57th Mtg, Min 1, 11 April; 60th Mtg, Min 3, 15 April and 62nd Mtg, Min 1, 18 April all in CAB 79/47.

60. Letter from Attlee to Chifley, 21 April 1946, PREM 8/179.

The records of the proceedings which I have thus far received make it clear that these proceedings have not been in the nature of consultations as that word is generally understood and as I have interpreted it. In reality they carry with them in form and substance all the responsibilities that would fall upon the shoulders of a Prime Minister at an imperial conference. . . .

I must tell you quite frankly that I am not in any position to assume on behalf of Canada an obligation of this kind during my forthcoming visit. . . .<sup>61</sup>

Attlee again poured oil on the troubled waters in a reply telegram on 11 May. Despite some squeaks and squeals, the engine of Commonwealth co-operation on defence was edging forward.

#### The Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1946

The 1946 Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting opened on 23 April. Though the conference had been planned to take place in three stages, it now actually took place in four. The first stage comprised representatives of the United Kingdom, Australia and New Zealand. Thus the British government could lay the groundwork for the entire conference by dealing with the two dominions most favourably disposed towards Commonwealth co-operation. The unswerving loyalty of New Zealand in most aspects of Commonwealth co-operation meant that British representatives could bring great pressure to bear on the Australian delegation during the first week. During this week the British Chiefs of Staff were present at every meeting.

After initial greetings, the meetings opened with an expose by Bevin on foreign policy. He pointed out that "Foreign policy was so closely linked with strategic needs that he feared he would be obliged

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61. Telegram, from Canada (Acting H.C.) to D.O., 10 May 1946, Ibid.

to encroach in his review on questions of defence and British Commonwealth communications". He stressed the problems that he was having in dealing with the Soviet Union. He also discussed the problems faced by Britain in trying to protect Commonwealth communications through the Mediterranean. Chifley followed laying particular emphasis on Australia's concern for security in the Pacific. Nash in his opening comments could not have been a more effective mouthpiece for British thinking on Commonwealth defence. He said:

Now, however, the United Kingdom was confronted with a situation more difficult than any which she had faced before, and he did not see how she could maintain her influence unless all parts of the Commonwealth came closely together in peace, as they had done in war. . . . If the British Commonwealth could be regarded as a unit in foreign policy there would be three world Powers of roughly equal influence -- the British Commonwealth, the United States and the Soviet Union.

After considerable discussion, Attlee chipped in with a typically laconic statement about the vulnerability of the United Kingdom, "The Empire had many of her eggs in a small basket in an uncomfortably exposed position". Lord Addison summed up:

. . . that two points in particular seemed to him to have emerged from the discussion; first, a general recognition of the need for more effective machinery for co-operation between the different parts of the Commonwealth; secondly, a general recognition that co-operation with the United States in many spheres of policy would also be necessary.<sup>62</sup>

This summing up by Addison reflected the epitome of British Cabinet technique in which a strong Prime Minister would place the key issues squarely before his colleagues who for various reasons have not come

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62. PMM(46)1st Mtg, Min 2, CAB 133/86.

to grips with them. From the minutes these two points appear to have been hit upon only tangentially in discussion, but they were indeed the two points of greatest concern for the British government in its attempt to build a viable system of Commonwealth defence.

The second meeting held later on 23 April was devoted to a discussion of PMM(46)1, "Strategic Position of the British Commonwealth". This report was a revised version of DO(46)47 previously discussed. The minutes of this meeting reflect only that, "The Meeting, after hearing the views of the Chiefs of Staff, had a full discussion on the strategy outlined in the report, with particular reference to its bearing on the United Nations Organisation".<sup>63</sup> Based on statements made at the fourth meeting, it appears that the Australians had sharp reservations about the approach of the British Chiefs of Staff to the problems of Commonwealth defence. The term "full discussion" when used by the Cabinet and Chiefs of Staff Secretariat is a euphemism to cover heated discussions.

At the third meeting on 24 April, the British government masterfully played the role that they hoped to carve out for themselves on a permanent basis of being the wise arbiters of an overall plan for Commonwealth defence. The issue of military bases was of critical importance to the two Pacific dominions. The United States government had been asking for rights on a variety of Pacific islands belonging to the United Kingdom and the two dominions. The two dominions did not want to give the United States exclusive rights

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63. PMM(46)2nd Mtg, Ibid.

in their territories, but they also strongly desired U.S. acceptance of an overall security agreement in the Pacific. They had little leverage in dealing with the U.S. on their own, but they were concerned that the government of the United Kingdom would use its greater leverage to further British interests elsewhere to the exclusion of their interests in the Pacific. Alanbrooke attempted to allay their fears with sensitivity and finesse.

Lord Alanbrooke said that the Chiefs of Staff were in favour of approaching this problem through a review of the defence requirements of the whole area and not, as the United States Government desired, by examining claims for base facilities in particular islands. At the same time, they thought it might be inexpedient to stipulate that there should be a formal Regional Agreement. The United States authorities might find difficulty in signing a formal agreement, which might have to be ratified by Congress.

Agreement was reached that the Commonwealth governments should present a united front on this issue. Following this opening Attlee summed up that:

He hope, that within the next day or so, agreement would be reached on the text of a formal declaration which the Foreign Secretary might make to the United States Secretary of State during the forthcoming meetings of Foreign Ministers in Paris; and Mr. Bevin would, in addition, take that opportunity of an informal talk in which he could explain to Mr. Byrnes the difficulties which Commonwealth Governments would find in dealing with these requests on the basis on which they had been put forward by the United States Government. He would, in particular, make it clear that we should find special difficulty in conceding the claim to exclusive rights in Canton, Christmas and Funafuti; and that we considered that facilities for the joint use of military bases should be granted as part of an agreement involving the acceptance of common obligations for defence in the area. Mr. Bevin would no doubt be able to report the result of his discussions with Mr. Byrnes before the Dominion Ministers left London; and it might be possible, if that became necessary, to arrange for Mr. Byrnes himself to discuss these matters with Dominion Ministers before he returned to the United States.



Thus, Attlee presented the government of the United Kingdom as being sensitive to the interests of the dominions and able to assist in solving problems that they could not solve on their own.<sup>64</sup>

It may be recalled that 24 April has already figured extensively in this narrative. That was the day that the Chiefs of Staff reversed their position on the announcement of the withdrawal of all British forces from Egypt as a concession in the negotiations with that country. Thus on that day the Chiefs of Staff met twice on their own as well as with the Defence Committee and the dominion Prime Ministers. Attlee for his part chaired meetings of the Defence Committee and the Cabinet dealing with the Egyptian issue as well as the meeting of dominion Prime Ministers. The strategic planning machinery developed during the war for dealing with multiple issues quickly and efficiently was proving its value in the brave new world that confronted British policy makers after the war.

On 25 April Attlee opened by announcing the decision reached by the Cabinet the previous evening on negotiations with Egypt. The meeting then moved on to a discussion of organization for Commonwealth defence. This topic was of fundamental importance for British policy makers if they were to succeed in creating peacetime Commonwealth defence planning machinery. Speaking first, Alanbrooke said that he hoped that a system similar to the Combined Chiefs of Staff which had worked so well during the war between the United States and the United Kingdom might serve as a model for the postwar organization of Commonwealth defence. The idea was that there should be a

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64. PMM(46)3rd Mtg, Ibid.

Commonwealth defence liaison system with representatives of the dominions' Chiefs of Staff in London and representatives of the United Kingdom's Chiefs of Staff in dominion capitals. These liaison staffs would co-ordinate strategic planning for Commonwealth defence and provide for the central control of Commonwealth forces in war. Each government would exercise complete control over their own Chiefs of Staff so that policy would be the result of consensus rather than direction from London. Addison added that "any Commonwealth defence organisation set up must allow for machinery of co-operation with the United States". After considerable discussion, Attlee summed up that, while there was general agreement on the need for co-operation on Commonwealth defence, the differences on how best to affect this co-operation might best be referred to the officials of the three governments who could work on redrafting the memorandum by the British Chiefs of Staff. Chifley withheld complete agreement with this proposal making it clear that he could not commit his government to any proposals related to defence before he had a chance to discuss them fully with his colleagues at home. The discussion then moved to the examination of another memorandum by the British Chiefs of Staff titled "Responsibilities for Commonwealth Defence". Again the Australians, while agreeing to the general premise that they would have to make a greater commitment to their own defence than they had before the war, had reservations about the British approach to the problem. They also said that they could not expand their commitments until they had fully examined the financial and manpower implications. Attlee turned this argument back on the Australian Prime Minister saying that he was very sensitive to the problems of manpower and finance as the United Kingdom currently had grave

difficulties in these two areas as a result of postwar commitments. He was backed up by the Chiefs of Staff with the statistical details of the situation. The New Zealand Deputy Prime Minister said that his government fully supported the contention that the United Kingdom had borne more than its share of the burden of Commonwealth defence before the war and that it was now time for a more equitable sharing of that burden. When Addison again tried to sum up in favour of passing the question to officials for further consideration, he again encountered Chifley's insistence that, while discussion of this issue could continue, he would not make any commitments binding Australia before returning home to consult with his colleagues.<sup>65</sup>

The fifth meeting started with the approval of the text of a proposal Bevin planned to present to Byrnes in Paris on regional security in the Pacific and the use of bases by the U.S. Addison and Attlee then returned to the issue of organization for Commonwealth defence. Both tried to break down Chifley's resistance to officials of the three governments drafting an agreed statement on this subject. Nash supported Addison and Attlee, and Evatt became more conciliatory. After discussion the Australians finally agreed to this proposal.<sup>66</sup> The first hurdle in achieving dominion defence co-operation had been cleared.

The next meeting on Sunday, 28 April, marked the beginning of the second stage with the arrival of Field Marshal Smuts. Conveniently, discussion now turned initially to topics in which the British

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65. PMM(46)4th Mtg, Ibid.

66. PMM(46)5th Mtg, Ibid.

Government, could expect Smuts to be "more royal than the king" on Commonwealth defence. The session opened with Bevin giving a resume on the Council of Foreign Ministers, before turning to the questions of the disposal of Italian colonies and the revision of the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty. On the issue of Italian colonies, when Attlee pointed out that these were "deficit areas" that cost Britain a considerable sum even on a care and maintenance basis, Smuts responded "that the strategic benefit of administration of these areas would be worth considerable expenditure of money". Prior to Smuts statement, "Mr. Nash said that if any one of the British Commonwealth Powers obtained the trusteeship of the Italian Colonies, it would be largely to secure the strategic communications of the Empire, and he suggested that it would be reasonable that other parts of the Empire should share the cost". Thus the British government netted tentative backing if they should manage to gain control of these areas. On the issue of the Egyptian Treaty, Smuts took strong exception to the British decision to promise withdrawal of all troops as a precondition to negotiating a new treaty. Bevin carefully retraced the background to the British decision based on the fear of widespread unrest. His explanation did little to placate Smuts who still expressed grave concern.<sup>67</sup>

The next three meetings discussed trusteeship, Palestine, and the Ruhr and Western Germany. Discussion returned to defence at the tenth meeting on 2 May. The first issue discussed was a revised draft of the Chiefs' of Staff memorandum "Organisation of Commonwealth Defence".<sup>68</sup>

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67. PMM(46)6th Mtg, Ibid.

68. PMM(46)20, Ibid.

This time Smuts objected to the paper. He argued that it would be hard for his government to justify additional defence machinery that had not existed before the war. It is interesting again to note the benefit of the multi-stage format of these meetings. Smuts alluded several times to the fact that he thought that the proposals would be unacceptable to Canada. One must wonder how successful the British government would have been in winning acceptance for its goals had Mackenzie King also been present. As it was, Attlee responded in a clear, low-keyed manner making several minor concessions. As the paper had already been revised to meet Chifley's objections, he responded that he was in general agreement with the paper and would use it for a basis for discussions with his colleagues. Nash was as ever supportive. Smuts then said that the concessions, which concerned terminology, largely met his objections. Attlee summed up that agreement seemed to be general and that it would be appropriate for each of the dominion governments to give this paper to their advisers to study specific plans for creating the necessary organization. The second fence on the course of postwar dominion defence co-operation was thus cleared.

The meeting then quickly trotted through a discussion of three other memoranda on defence. The first was a recapitulation of "Responsibilities for Commonwealth Defence" for the benefit of Smuts. Then two papers, one each by the Australian and New Zealand governments, were registered with a minimum of comment. The Australian paper titled "Australian Defence Policy" is significant mainly for its criticism of Joint Chiefs of Staff system based upon Australian experience with the Joint Chiefs of Staff in Australia.<sup>69</sup>

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69. PMM(46)7, 23 April 1946, Ibid.

This issue was to continue to cause friction between Australia and the United Kingdom over the machinery to be employed for Commonwealth co-operation on defence. The New Zealand paper titled "Defence Co-operation and Responsibilities within the British Commonwealth" was prepared by the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff and reflected almost total consonance with current British thinking:

An adequate organisation dealing with Commonwealth defence is essential for the future. This, in form, might consist of the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff and Joint Staff Missions in London, appointed by and representing the Chiefs of Staff of other parts of the Commonwealth.<sup>70</sup>

The meeting concluded with discussions of the British Commonwealth occupation force in Japan, disposal of Polish armed forces and the expected arrival of Mackenzie King.<sup>71</sup>

The eleventh meeting on 3 May marked the last meeting with Chifley and the end of the second stage of the conference. Dr. Evatt, the Australian Minister for External Affairs, however, stayed to represent Australian interests.

The third stage of the conference consisted of meetings on 6,7 and 8 May. The Chiefs of Staff attended only the first of these meetings when the topic of military bases in the Pacific was again discussed. Attlee reported that Byrnes had reacted unfavourably to Bevin's proposals. In particular Byrnes had been emphatic that the U.S. was not interested in a regional security pact in the South and Southwest Pacific. Both Evatt and Nash were obviously disappointed in

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70. PMM(46)16, 27 April 1946, Ibid.

71. PMM(46)10th Mtg, Ibid.

the American reaction, but both were equally firm that rights to islands in the Pacific would not be given to the U.S. without some compensation. The end result of this episode can only have been to bring home to the antipodean dominions that, however much they might need American co-operation to guarantee their security, it was not at all clear at this time whether the United States would be willing to assume that role or even be very co-operative.<sup>72</sup> In a discussion of the political situation in India at the thirteenth meeting, dominion representatives seemed to give unanimous support for British attempts to keep India in the Commonwealth. Evatt was particularly concerned "that if she did decide to leave the Commonwealth the United Kingdom Government would propose to include in any treaty with her adequate provisions on defence matters".<sup>73</sup> After the fourteenth meeting, the conference adjourned until the arrival of Mackenzie King expected on 20 May.

Whether by intent or not, the final stage of the conference in which Mackenzie King participated had very little to do with defence. Attlee and Addison chose to address the issue of defence liaison with Mackenzie King in private and met with typical noncommittal results.<sup>74</sup> When defence was discussed at the penultimate meeting on 22 May, the purpose was to detail the current defence burden being borne by the United Kingdom. Discussion focused on a memorandum on the subject prepared by the Dominions Secretary. Bevin led a parade of

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72. PMM(46)12th Mtg, Min 1, Ibid.

73. PMM(46)13th Mtg, Ibid.

74. James Eayrs, In Defence of Canada, Vol III, Peacemaking and Deterrence, (Toronto, 1972), pp. 222-3.

British ministers explaining Britain's current plight. He was followed by Dalton and Attlee. The memorandum and presentations had the desired effect. Mackenzie King, who spoke first, ducked the issue and suggested that the U.S. might be persuaded to assume a greater part of the burden of world security. Evatt referred to the memorandum several times as an "impressive document" and concluded, "Whatever could be done to lighten the burden on the United Kingdom should be done". The ever loyal Nash agreed that it appeared that Britain bore an inordinate burden, but feared that New Zealand could never raise figures that were very large in comparison to those currently being borne by the United Kingdom. Smuts said that he found the memorandum extremely depressing; to think that these were the fruits of victory.

One thing, however, appeared to him quite clear -- that the burden on one member of the group was well nigh intolerable. It was unfair to look to the British Isles, after the sacrifices made during the war, to continue to pay for the peace at the rate now indicated. The Dominions had been very proud of the record of the United Kingdom as well as of their own efforts, but they had not perhaps thought of the burdens she bore. These matters had not been brought out, but they must now be considered very carefully.

The tone of these comments must have been quite moving for Mackenzie King now re-entered the discussion saying that he hoped that his previous reserve on this issue had not been misunderstood. He said that he was not opposed to the closest co-ordination on defence matters only to any attempt to form a "Commonwealth defence policy" that was centrally controlled. Lord Addison magnanimously summed up:

. . . there was unanimous support among British Commonwealth Governments for the political principles enunciated by Mr. Mackenzie King. These were of the first importance. There was much slipshod thought on the subject of Commonwealth relations and it was not generally realised that the Commonwealth was an association of



independent states living and working according to common ideals.

On this note, British ministers could bring down the curtain with a great deal of satisfaction over their carefully orchestrated attempt to breathe new life into the Commonwealth as an agency for helping to secure British interests in the postwar world.<sup>75</sup>

The final communique<sup>76</sup> issued at the close of the meetings revealed little about the actual proceedings. Military co-operation was given only one clause listed among subjects discussed. One should not allow this mundane official statement to mask the real accomplishments of the conference. British policy makers could justly be proud of the finesse with which they had handled the meetings. With only New Zealand's co-operation as a given, they had succeeded in turn in gaining the agreement of Australia and South Africa to a greater degree of co-operation. They had even forced that arch opponent of any sort of "Commonwealth policy", Mackenzie King onto the defensive. The principle of a system of military liaison officers between the United Kingdom and the dominions had been approved. The dominion Prime Ministers seemed also to have been genuinely moved by the extent of the defence burden being borne by the United Kingdom. On this issue as in other matters, the approach charted by Attlee and Addison -- low-keyed and businesslike with a firm command of the facts -- set just the right tone for disarming nationalist suspicions of an over-bearing mother country. The shift to a regional approach also

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75. PMM(46)18th Mtg, Min 2, CAB 133/86.

76. Reprinted in H.J. Harvey, Consultation and Co-operation in the Commonwealth, (London, 1952), pp. 114-116.

helped to win support that might otherwise have been withheld. One can only ponder what would have been the result had Chifley, Smuts and Mackenzie King all been round the table at the first meeting, each with his own objections to almost any British proposal towards co-ordinating defence efforts as a matter of course. It seems doubtful that any amount of skill on Attlee's or Addison's part could have broken down three barriers at once. The fates had smiled on this initial attempt by the postwar British government to build a coalition to support British global interests. That they had genuinely succeeded in winning support can be seen in the long speech made by the Australian Prime Minister to the Australian Parliament on 19 June.<sup>77</sup> That the Chiefs of Staff were well satisfied with the progress that had been made can be seen in their reply when asked by Attlee whether there was any particular point that they would like him to make in his personal discussions with Mackenzie King. Replying on 28 May, five days after the official end of the conference, they said they were satisfied with the current defence liaison system recently agreed to and already in operation between the United Kingdom and Canada.<sup>78</sup> That they had achieved less than they thought would not be apparent for a considerable time. For the time being the thoughts of Attlee and his military advisers turned to other problems.

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77. Excerpts of this speech can be found in Harvey, Consultation and Co-operation, pp. 211-216.

78. COS(46)83rd Mtg, Min 21, CAB 79/48. The Chiefs of Staff were referring to the Canadian Joint Staff Mission in London established in January 1945 and still in existence.

#### Chapter 4: Progress in Slow Motion: May 1946 - September 1947

Even as they laboured with the task of creating a closer system for strategic co-operation with the old dominions during the Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1946, those concerned with formulating Britain's postwar strategy had to continue to mind the other ingredients in the postwar strategic stew. As the Prime Ministers' Meeting progressed towards what appeared to be a satisfactory conclusion, the pot containing Britain's strategic position in the Middle East demanded attention. The situation in Middle East threatened to be a classic example of too many chefs spoiling the broth. While Bevin and the Foreign Office attempted to grapple with the immediate problems in the region, the Chiefs of Staff struggled to arrive at a long range strategy for the area, and Attlee continued to doubt whether Britain should be involved in the region in the first place.

##### The Middle East: The new strategic axis

The most immediate problem confronting British policy makers in the Middle East was the ongoing negotiations to revise the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty of 1936. At a Staff Conference on 13 May, Attlee sought the Chiefs' of Staff approval for the answer he proposed to give the Conservatives. They were arguing that current negotiations would undermine Britain's ability to defend its interests in the Canal Zone. The Chiefs of Staff concurred in the innocuous:

It is the policy of His Majesty's Government to reach agreement with the Egyptian Government, in order to make effective provision for the defence of the Canal Zone.

Discussions are now proceeding between the Delegation and the Egyptian Government with this object in view.<sup>1</sup>

On 17 May the Chiefs of Staff received a personal report from Major General Jacob on the status of the negotiations through 12 May. At this meeting the Chiefs of Staff endorsed the recommendation for immediately moving the Middle East Headquarters to the Canal Zone. "The cost of doing so was small in comparison with the favourable influence such a move would have on our relations with the Egyptians at the present moment".<sup>2</sup> On 20 May it appears that the War Office had had second thoughts on this decision. General Simpson, the Vice Chief of the Imperial General Staff (VCIGS), argued that it might be wiser to delay the withdrawal of Middle East Headquarters from Cairo until the JPS had completed their report on strategic requirements in the Middle East. If the report recommended moving Middle East Headquarters outside of Egypt a temporary move to the Canal Zone would be inefficient. Tedder countered that an immediate move was imperative regardless of possible inefficiency and carried the day.

The Chiefs of Staff attitude hardened again in early June as it appeared that their previous concessions far from encouraging agreement with the Egyptians merely increased the demand for more concessions. The Egyptians now demanded that on top of the withdrawal of all forces, Britain must renounce the right of automatic re-entry in the event of war. At a Cabinet meeting on 6 June, Alanbrooke expressed concern about the "slipping slope of concessions". The first concession of total withdrawal had not yielded Egyptian

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1. COS(46)76th Mtg, Min 3, CAB 79/48.

2. COS(46)79th, Min 6 Ibid.

goodwill, what guaranteed that this new one would be any more successful. The Chiefs of Staff were instructed to work with Bevin to propose a solution.<sup>3</sup> Their attempt to solve their differences with Bevin was unsuccessful and at a Cabinet meeting on 7 June the Chiefs of Staff went on record opposing the latest proposal. Attlee thanked them for their views and reminded the Cabinet that it was important that the Chiefs of Staff spoke frankly. The Cabinet then decided to proceed with proposals incorporating the latest Egyptian demand.<sup>4</sup>

The real issue confronting both the Chiefs of Staff and the government was to find an agreed position over British involvement in the Middle East. As the Chiefs of Staff had already discovered making decisions about Egypt made little sense without a concrete strategy for the Middle East as a whole. As this critical issue had been left unresolved after the debates in the Defence Committee in early April, the Chiefs of Staff again set out in search of a solution in late May. On 24 May they approved a JPS report entitled "Strategic Requirements in the Middle East".<sup>5</sup> The version of this report forwarded to the Defence Committee the next day concluded:

(a) In war, the security of Egypt and Palestine is vital to the defence of the Middle East. . . .

(b) As a result of the concession of evacuation of Egypt, we require the right to locate in Cyrenaica the forces necessary for the defence of our sea and air communications in the Eastern Mediterranean a part of our strategic bomber force, certain units, equipment and stocks, and possibly part of our strategic reserve.

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3. CM(46)57th Conclusions, Min 1, CAB 128/5.

4. CM(46)58th Conclusions, Min 1, Ibid.

5. JP(46)100(Final), CAB 84/81 considered at COS(46)82nd Mtg, Min 1, CAB 79/48

(c) The strategic importance of Cyrenaica has therefore increased considerably and it is of the greatest importance that the Trusteeship of Cyrenaica should be allotted to us.

(d) Unless we obtain these minimum requirements, no effective defence of the Middle East is possible with all that this implies.<sup>6</sup>

This report received rough treatment when considered by the Defence Committee on 27 May. Labour ministers including Bevin opposed the Chiefs' of Staff paper.

The Prime Minister, summing up the discussion, said it was apparent that it would not be possible for the Defence Committee to endorse the Chiefs of Staff report under consideration. It was clear that our whole position in the Middle East required re-examination to determine our exact strategic requirements in the Middle East with particular reference to what in the Middle East would it be essential for us to defend in a possible future war, to determine what would be our wartime requirements to defend these essentials and what would be our peacetime minimum military requirements on which we could expand in war and from which we could have access to those facilities required in war.<sup>7</sup>

Following this donnybrook in the Defence Committee, the Chiefs of Staff set about to pick up the pieces and again try to formulate a Middle East strategy.<sup>8</sup> Attlee increased the pressure on the Chiefs of Staff with the following minute which he wrote on 31 May:

It is useless to provide for the defence of the Middle East, if the home base is not secure. Before entering into commitments for defending the Suez Canal and our oil supplies and the forward defensive zone covering them, I want to be assured that they do not involve an unacceptable reduction in the forces required to ward off attacks on Britain from Western Europe.<sup>9</sup>

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6. DO(46)67, CAB 131/2.

7. DO(46)17th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/1.

8. COS(46)83rd Mtg, Min 22 and COS(46)84th Mtg, Min 4, CAB 79/48.

9. D15/46, Attlee to Chiefs of Staff, CAB 21/2277.

The Chiefs of Staff considered a revised report prepared by the JPS on 12 June.<sup>10</sup> With respect to Attlee's minute, Ismay told the Chiefs of Staff that the Prime Minister had in mind the question of whether it would be necessary to send an expeditionary force to the continent. The committee agreed ". . . we should avoid sending forces to the Continent to fight a rear guard action at the expense of maintaining forces in countries overseas where air bases could be established from which to strike at the enemy". After further discussion on 14 June they forwarded the report as DO(46)80 for consideration by the Defence Committee.<sup>11</sup>

Before the report came before the Defence Committee, Attlee called a Staff Conference on 12 July to discuss it. This paper and this Staff Conference were the most important since the end of the war in addressing British postwar strategy. DO(46)80 clearly spelled out the air strategy that had been adopted by the Chiefs of Staff:

If Russia were the enemy, her great superiority of man-power would necessitate our making the maximum use of our technical and scientific superiority and particularly of our air power to strike back at the enemy's vital centres, war potential and communications. In war with Russia, bases in the United Kingdom alone would not be sufficient for this task. The Middle East provides the only air bases from which effective offensive action can be undertaken against the important Russian industrial and oil-producing areas of Southern Russia and the Caucasus.<sup>12</sup>

Attlee opened the discussion by challenging the Chiefs of Staff on

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10. JP(46)108(Final), withheld in CAB 79/82 but available in CAB 21/2086 considered at COS(46)92nd Mtg, Min 1, withheld from CAB 79/49 but available in CAB 21/2086.

11. COS(46)93rd Mtg, Min 2, CAB 79/49.

12. DO(46)80, CAB 131/3.

what appeared to him to be their assumption that in the event of war with the Soviet Union, they were willing to concede the rest of Western Europe to the Soviet Union. Tedder, who spoke first for the Chiefs of Staff, did not respond directly to Attlee's question, but offered that the paper was intended to deal with defence of the Middle East and show its relation to the defence of the United Kingdom. Attlee continued by questioning whether an attack on industrial and oil producing areas in south Russia and the Caucasus from air bases in the Middle East could check a Russian attack on the United Kingdom and whether Britain had the forces to mount such an attack. Sir John Cunningham, the new First Sea Lord,<sup>13</sup> responded,

. . . it had been proved from past experience that our own resources in land forces, unless supported by much larger European land forces, could not hold the position in Europe against any major aggressor. For the time being, therefore, it would seem necessary to accept the fact that the Russians would reach the Western seaboard. We must therefore limit our attacks to places where the enemy could be most hurt and from where we could conduct an offensive from bases secure against land attack except by forces with which we could compete.

Attlee continued asking about the vulnerability of the United Kingdom, the vulnerability of bases in the Middle East, the preponderance of Russian strength, the weakness of sea communications through the Mediterranean, how Britain could justify its position in the Middle East other than to be prepared for a war with the Soviet Union and how Britain could deny Russian demands for her own access to the Mediterranean. Attlee's assault on the Chiefs of Staff position was incisive and reflected a strong command of the issues involved. The Chiefs of Staff and General Ismay gradually gained confidence and put

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13. Sir John H. D. Cunningham replaced Sir Andrew B. Cunningham as First Sea Lord on 6 June 1946.



up a credible show of batsmanship against Attlee's fast bowling. Attempting to place the Chiefs' of Staff strategy in historical perspective, Cunningham said, " we had won previous wars by being able to strike at the enemy's softest spot by amphibious operations. The advent of the air had reinforced the amphibious nature of our Commonwealth strategy." The Chiefs of Staff seem to have succeeded in convincing the Prime Minister at least partially of their position:

THE PRIME MINISTER said that the conclusion could be drawn from the above discussion that the United Kingdom could no longer be regarded as the sole base for Commonwealth operations. That conclusion would have to be borne in mind in all future reviews.<sup>14</sup>

The paper came before the Defence Committee on 19 July. Attlee used this session more to educate other members of his government about the complexities of British defence and the sticky wicket of the Middle East rather than to reach a decision. It would appear that after his lengthy discussion with the Chiefs of Staff he desired more time to consider the problem himself.

He therefore suggested that the Defence Committee should do no more than take note of the conclusions reached by the Chiefs of Staff, and that they should be re-examined after (i) the results of the forthcoming Peace Conference became apparent, and the future status of European and Middle East countries could be foreseen; (ii) a further examination of the overall Commonwealth strategic concept was made in the light of international conditions and of the latest developments in weapons and methods of war.<sup>15</sup>

For the third time he backed down from pressing this issue.

Meanwhile, the anvil of Anglo-Egyptian treaty negotiations

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14. COS(46)108th Mtg, withheld in CAB 79/50, but available in CAB 21/2086.

15. DO(46)22nd Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/1.

against which British strategy in the Middle East was hammered out remained a moving target. After the Chiefs of Staff had been overruled at the Cabinet meeting on 7 June, negotiations had proceeded. The new treaty called for a Joint Defence Board between Egypt and Britain modeled on that shared by the United States and Canada. The board was to advise the two countries on defence issues of mutual interest and to insure the maintenance of military facilities in Egypt following the evacuation of all British forces. Fences seem to have been mended between the politicians and their military advisers when the Defence Committee approved the Chiefs' of Staff plans for implementing the evacuation protocols of the proposed treaty.<sup>16</sup> The Chiefs of Staff were again hostile to the latest Foreign Office treaty draft at their meeting on 17 July,<sup>17</sup> but when asked to compromise on the date for the final withdrawal of all British troops thirteen days later, their main concern was to prevent a breakdown in the negotiations.<sup>18</sup> By 10 September the Chiefs of Staff had been informed that the only outstanding issue in the treaty negotiations was the future of Sudan.<sup>19</sup> On 4 October the Chiefs of Staff instructed the JPS to prepare a report on the possible composition of the Joint Defence Board with Egypt.<sup>20</sup> In their

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16. DO(46)84, CAB 131/3, considered at DO(46)21st Mtg, Min 2 and 3 CAB 131/1.

17. JP(46)140(Final), CAB 84/83, considered at COS(46)112th Mtg, Min 2, CAB 79/50.

18. COS(46)119th Mtg, Min 1, Ibid.

19. COS(46)137th Mtg, Min 4, CAB 79/51.

20. COS(46)148th Mtg, Min 4, CAB 79/52.

instructions the Chiefs of Staff reminded the JPS of the importance this board would have as a precedent for future co-operation with other countries in the Middle East. The Chiefs of Staff approved the JPS report on 23 October.<sup>21</sup> When the Defence Committee met the next day to consider the proposed treaty, the Chiefs of Staff approved the military clauses. The treaty called for the withdrawal of all British troops by 1 September 1949, for the establishment of a Joint Defence Board and reserved air transit rights for discussion by the Joint Defence Board. Montgomery<sup>22</sup> speaking for the Chiefs of Staff said that British military interests would depend entirely on the goodwill of the Egyptians after the signing of the treaty. He thought that once the current uproar had died down chances were good the Egyptians would be more co-operative. He added the caveat that loss of rights in Egypt would increase the importance of Palestine.<sup>23</sup> Sudan remained the one stumbling block in completing the new treaty. That stumbling block, however, proved insurmountable and on 9 December Sidqi Pasha, the Egyptian Prime Minister, resigned and the possibility of a new treaty in the near term evaporated.

The failure of the attempted renegotiation of the treaty with Egypt must have stirred mixed emotions for the government's military advisers. They had certainly been sceptical of the process at times as has been seen from their periodic rebellions. Yet after each of

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21. JP(46)188(Final), CAB 84/84 considered at COS(46)156th Mtg, Min 8, Ibid.

22. Field Marshal B.L. Montgomery had replaced Field Marshal Alanbrooke as CIGS on 25 June 1946.

23. DO(46)30th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/1.

these rebellions they had again applied themselves to the task of trying to strike the best bargain possible. The crux of the issue was that if the Labour Government, and specifically Bevin, could deliver a new foundation for British interests in the Middle East based upon co-operation with the Arabs, they were in favour of it. They were continually worried about the prospect of facing unrest that at the least would sap Britain's limited military strength and at worst be beyond their means to control. On the other hand, their own experience led them to be sceptical about the chances for such co-operation. When their scepticism boiled over they rebelled, but tactful handling by Attlee and Britain's military weakness in the face of its many postwar commitments led them back to the desire for a long term easing of tensions.

Meanwhile trouble in Greece and Palestine forced British policy makers again to reassess their position in the Middle East. This reassessment marked the final act in Attlee's attempt to cut Britain free from entanglements in the Middle East. Three papers on strategy in the Middle East, one by Bevin<sup>24</sup> and two by the Chiefs of Staff,<sup>25</sup> led Attlee to call a Staff Conference on 7 January. Once again a Staff Conference was used to examine Britain's overall position in the Middle East.

THE CONFERENCE had a full and detailed discussion about the factors governing the position of the Middle East in relation to the defence of the Commonwealth and the strategic, political, financial and economic consequences

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24. DO(47)2, "British Strategic Requirements in the Middle East", 2 January 1947, CAB 131/4.

25. DO(47)1 "Future Policy Towards Greece and Turkey", 1 January 1947 and DO(47)3 "Palestine - Strategic Requirements", 6 January 1947, Ibid.

of adopting a policy of attempting to retain the defence facilities compatible with our strategic requirements, or of foregoing these requirements.<sup>26</sup>

In the officialese of Whitehall, "full and detailed discussion" indicates a disagreement over the topic at issue among the principals at the meeting.

The following day, General Hollis informed the Chiefs of Staff that the Prime Minister, Foreign Secretary and the Minister of Defence<sup>27</sup> were all agreed "that as a result of the Staff Conference, it would be premature to place the subject before the Cabinet . . .". The Prime Minister had called another Staff Conference to be attended solely by himself, the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of Defence for 9 January. As the Chiefs of Staff were in the process of weaving the defence of the Middle East into the larger framework of an overall defence policy, they agreed to supply Prime Minister with a copy of their aide memoire titled "Future Defence Policy". They also directed the secretary to prepare another paper specifically dealing with the Middle East in relation to their overall strategy.

As regards the further paper, it should specifically deal with the importance of Egypt in relation to the general defence of the Middle East, and then show the importance of Palestine to the defence of Egypt. Secondly, that the retention of facilities and forces in the Middle East was specifically a part of the defence of the Commonwealth and directly of the United Kingdom. Thirdly, to point out that the size of the forces in the Middle East in peacetime would not be large, and lastly, that our ability to retain facilities in the area depended on maintaining the friendship of the Arab States, and that the withdrawal of our influence and control of the area would in their opinion mean that it became dominated by a potential enemy and thus seriously limit our war capacity.<sup>28</sup>

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26. COS(47)6th Mtg, DEFE 4/1.

27. Mr. A.V, Alexander assumed this post in December 1946.

28. COS(47)7th Mtg, Min 4, DEFE 4/1.

At the Staff Conference with Bevin and Alexander on 9 January, Attlee "was still not satisfied that our overall defence plans required continuance of our present policy in the Middle East, and it was agreed that the discussion would be continued with the Chiefs of Staff present".<sup>29</sup> At this further Staff Conference held on Monday, 13 January the issue evaporated. Attlee conceded that as stated in the Chiefs' of Staff aide memoire a firm hold on the Middle East was one of the three essential requirements of British defence policy.<sup>30</sup>

Thus for the fourth and final time, Attlee abandoned his attempt to bring about a general British withdrawal from the Middle East. Why Attlee dropped this issue is a question of fundamental importance in assessing Attlee's role in postwar strategy. In his memoirs, Montgomery states that when the Prime Minister in January 1947 argued for abandoning the Middle East, he secured the agreement of the other two Chiefs of Staff that they would join him in resigning if Attlee persisted. This information was privately conveyed to Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff heard no more about it.<sup>31</sup> It has been argued that this threat of resignation by the Chiefs of Staff was the reason for Attlee's change of course on 13 January 1947.<sup>32</sup> Montgomery was in the

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29. Minute by P. Dixon, 10 January 1947, ME/47/5, FO 800/476.

30. COS(47)5(0), DEFE 5/3, considered at COS(47)9th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/1. COS(47)5(0) was revised as a result of this Staff Conference. Paragraph 8 which appears to have named the Soviet Union as the enemy was deleted. Thus the paper in DEFE 5/3 is dated 23 January 1947.

31. Field Marshal Montgomery, Memoirs, (London, 1958), p. 436.

32. Raymond Smith and John Zametica, "The Cold Warrior: Clement Attlee reconsidered, 1945-7", International Affairs, Vol 61, No 2, p. 252.

Soviet Union from 6 to 10 January, however, only returning to England on Saturday, 11 January. Thus he missed the Staff Conference on 7 January as well as the Chiefs of Staff meeting the following day. It is hard to imagine that upon arriving back in England on a Saturday that he organized a revolt with his two fellow Chiefs of Staff, both of whom he was on poor terms with, before the Staff Conference on Monday, 13 January. A more plausible explanation is that Attlee backed down for much the same reasons as he had on the three previous occasions. Before the Staff Conference on 7 January, Attlee had written a detailed memorandum on 5 January to Bevin attacking the arguments of both Bevin and the Chiefs of Staff for maintaining Britain's position in the Middle East. As with Attlee's previous attacks his arguments were measured and clear.<sup>33</sup> Alan Bullock says of this memorandum, "This was the most radical criticism Bevin had to face from inside the Government during his five and a half years as Foreign Secretary. It came not from the Left, but from the Prime Minister".<sup>34</sup> Bevin's eight page reply dated 9 January together with the two memoranda by the Chiefs of Staff were tabled at Attlee's Staff Conference with Bevin and Alexander at 5 p.m. the same day. Although Attlee left the meeting unconvinced, he can have had little time to digest the three papers in front of him. They confirmed the strong opposition to his own position by both his Foreign Secretary and his top military advisers and were soundly argued. Attlee's leadership style probably explains the rest. Attlee's assault was fueled by his own strong doubts about Britain's ability as well as need to hold the

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33. Minute from Attlee to Bevin, ME/47/1, FO 800/476.

34. Bullock, Bevin, pp. 349-50.

Middle East. His doubts were not unfounded as will be substantiated in the following chapters. He had therefore pushed his case hard, very hard, but Bevin and the Chiefs of Staff had stood firm and countered with equally well thought out positions. The only way forward for Attlee would have been to appeal over their heads to the Cabinet. The importance of Bevin and the Chiefs of Staff to both Attlee and his government would have made such an option exceedingly risky. If he could not defeat them head on with the force of his own logic, he would defer to their judgement.

#### Indian Independence: Half a Loaf

Attlee's decision to abandon his arguments for British withdrawal from the Middle East established that region firmly as the new geographic centre for Commonwealth defence. As we have seen the Chiefs of Staff had argued the importance of the Middle East right from the end of the war. By the middle of 1946 they were firmly committed to that region as vital. While the importance of the Middle East came to over-shadow that of India in the Chiefs' of Staff strategy, the strategic implications of Indian independence did not pass unnoticed. Indeed the Chiefs of Staff played a critical role in the departmental skirmishing in Whitehall that accompanied Indian independence. That the final form of Indian independence bore only partial resemblance to their intentions is not surprising. In the frantic negotiations that ended the Raj, no party achieved its full objectives including the Indian political parties. However, the centre piece of the Chiefs of Staff plan for the future of India was achieved and in this issue they were on the same side of the barricades as Attlee.



The possibility of the failure of the Cabinet Mission in June 1946 again focused the Chiefs' of Staff attention on India. On 5 June 1946 the Chiefs of Staff and Field Marshal Auchinleck, Commander in Chief, India, attended a Cabinet meeting to discuss the possibility of the Mission's failure.<sup>35</sup> The proposed courses of action suggested by the Cabinet Mission obviously caught the Chiefs of Staff unprepared. "The Chief of the Imperial General Staff said that these appreciations by the Cabinet Mission and the Viceroy raised very serious issues and the Chiefs of Staff would wish to have further time in which to consider them." That afternoon the Chiefs of Staff met for a second time that day to consider this issue. They were informed that the Cabinet had come down strongly in favour of remaining in India and assuming responsibility for law and order until an agreement was reached. The Chiefs of Staff instructed the JPS to prepare a report for their consideration by 10 June.

The JPS report could not have been more candid about the current British position.<sup>36</sup>

A policy of remaining in the whole of India involves responsibility for the maintenance of law and order throughout the country. Provided the Indian armed forces remain loyal, this policy would result in an acceptable military commitment and would safeguard our long-term strategic interests. The reliability of the Indian armed forces is, however, open to serious doubt.

This policy is, therefore, one of bluff,<sup>37</sup> depending on the gamble of continued loyalty of the Indian armed

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35. CM(46)55th Mtg, Confidential Annex, CAB 128/7, also T.O.P., Vol VII, No. 455, pp. 812-9.

36. JP(46)114(Final), CAB 84/82 considered at COS(46)91st Mtg, Min 2; CAB 79/49.

37. Emphasis added.

forces. If it failed we might ultimately be forced to withdraw ignominiously from the whole of India.

The only alternative is a policy of remaining in the whole of India and accepting the military commitment of providing the necessary British reinforcements, should the Indian armed forces become disaffected. The implications of this are very serious, involving the abandonment of commitments hitherto regarded as inescapable and grave repercussions on the release scheme with consequent effect on morale.

The Chiefs of Staff amended these conclusions, dropping the statement about bluff, setting the strength of British reinforcements required in the event of disaffection of the Indian armed forces at five divisions and phrasing the consequences of disaffection firstly in terms of damage to the import/export programmes of the government and secondly to the release scheme. In this revised form the report came before the Defence Committee on 14 June.<sup>38</sup> Following Bevin's strong endorsement of the Chiefs' of Staff conclusions, "THE PRIME MINISTER, summing up, said that it appeared right that we should adopt a policy of remaining in the whole of India and firmly accepting responsibility for law and order".

Ten days later the Chiefs of Staff considered another paper by the JPS, "Withdrawal of British Forces from India — Effect on Strategic Requirements".<sup>39</sup> This paper resulted from a discussion by the Chiefs of Staff of the impact of the withdrawal of Indian troops from the Middle East and the possibility of a future government of

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38. DO(46)68, CAB 131/2, also T.O.P., Vol VII, No. 509, pp. 889-900, considered at DO(46)19th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/1 also T.O.P., Vol VII, No. 527, pp.926-30.

39. JP(46)103(Final), CAB 82/82, considered at COS(46)97th Mtg, Min 19, CAB 79/49.

India limiting or expelling all British service personnel from India.<sup>40</sup> The paper was sent to the India Office for their information, and led to the beginning of consultation between the JPS and the India Office on drafting military clauses for use in any treaty that might accompany Indian independence.<sup>41</sup> The report's importance, however, stems from the fact that it served as the foundation for the Chiefs' of Staff initiative to keep India in the Commonwealth and also marked the further crystallization of the Chiefs' of Staff thinking on the strategic importance of India. The report concluded that if all British service personnel were evicted by a future government, a united India would still be capable of its own defence against all potential opponents except the Soviet Union, but that it would be doubtful that Britain could secure its strategic requirements without a minimum of British personnel present in India. The Chiefs of Staff in discussion modified the report to read:

India possesses great manpower resources from which we have in the past maintained a reservoir of trained personnel for the Armed Forces to assist us in meeting our defence commitments in the Commonwealth. India also possesses a growing industrial capacity. We shall, therefore, require to use India as a main support area.

The Chiefs of Staff also added the requirement to use airfields for long range strategic bombing in time of war. It is useful to note these two positions as bench-marks of the Chiefs' of Staff attitude towards an independent India as both would be altered in the light of later developments.

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40. COS(46)80th Mtg, Min 11, 20 May 1946, CAB 79/48.

41. This consultation between the India Office and the JPS can be traced in file L/WS/1/1044, pp. 57-83, India Office Records and Library. (IORL)

Following these deliberations in June, India seems to have been shifted to the back burner in British strategic calculations. On 30 August General Ismay again raised the issue by recalling the Chiefs of Staff discussion of JP(46)103.<sup>42</sup> As this paper had not gone forward to the Prime Minister, "he thought neither the latter nor the Cabinet were fully aware of what were the likely repercussions from the military point of view on our Imperial strategy if India chose to stand out from the Commonwealth". He thought that the Prime Minister should be informed that "from the military point of view that it was as nearly vital as anything could be to ensure that India remained within the Commonwealth". Ismay's position was strongly seconded by Cunningham. As a result, the committee invited General Ismay to write a minute for the Prime Minister along the lines that he had suggested. This meeting marks the beginning of the Chiefs' of Staff initiative to maintain an independent India in the Commonwealth. An initiative that would reverberate throughout Whitehall for the next six months. They maintained this drive right through the transfer of power, though they became sceptical of the durability of dominion status as an expedient to facilitate this process. With the Prime Minister and eventually Mountbatten, the Chiefs of Staff provided the motive force within the British government for insuring that India remained within the Commonwealth.

In late September the Chiefs' of Staff activity with respect to India quickened. On 16 September, they solicited the help of the India Office and the Foreign Office in an attempt to dissuade the

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42. COS(46)133rd Mtg, Min 2, CAB 79/51, also T.O.P., Vol VIII, No. 224, pp. 348-50.

interim government in India from precipitously demanding the withdrawal of all Indian forces from overseas.<sup>43</sup> The Vice Chiefs of Staff approved the resulting paper prepared by the JPS at their meeting on 24 September for submission to the Prime Minister, the Secretary of State for India Lord Pethick Lawrence and the Defence Committee.<sup>44</sup> The Defence Committee considered this paper on 2 October<sup>45</sup> and Pethick Lawrence sent a copy to the Viceroy, Lord Wavell, on 26 September.<sup>46</sup> On 19 and 20 September respectively, the Vice Chiefs and then the Chiefs of Staff approved submitting the conclusions of JP(46)103 to the Defence Committee as DO(46)104 and a report by the Chiefs of Staff Committee, India, titled "Appreciation of the Strategic Value of India to the British Commonwealth of Nations" as DO(46)113.<sup>47</sup>

The first round in the row among Whitehall officials over the future of India that was to last until the following March occurred on 27 September. The principals in this debate were the Chiefs of Staff and the India Office, but it eventually became a battle between the Chiefs of Staff and all other departments concerned with British overseas policy. On 27 September the Chiefs of Staff met with Sir

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43. COS(46)140th Mtg, Min 9, CAB 79/51.

44. JP(46)181(Final), CAB 84/84 considered at COS(46)145th Mtg, Min 3, CAB 79/52.

45. DO(56)112, CAB 131/3 considered at DO(46)26th Mtg, Min 4, CAB 131/1.

46. T.O.P., Vol VIII, No. 371, pp. 597-604.

47. DO(46)104, CAB 131/3 and T.O.P., Vol VIII, No. 254, pp. 415-6; and DO(46)114, CAB 131/3 and T.O.P., Vol VIII, No. 26, Enclosure II, pp. 53-7 both considered at COS(46)142nd Mtg, Min 3, CAB 79/52 and COS(46)143rd Mtg, Min 3, T.O.P., Vol VIII, No. 339, p. 547.

David Monteath, the Permanent Under-Secretary of the India Office, to discuss a Joint Planning Staff paper on "Future Treaty with India - Military Considerations".<sup>48</sup> After a statement by Montgomery on the importance of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and by Cunningham stressing the need to frame any treaty clauses in the broadest possible context, Monteath showed his colours stating that he thought the report was too optimistic from the point of view of the Indian government being co-operative. Ismay offered, "The Chiefs of Staff had always held that India should be in the Commonwealth, in which case there would be no necessity for a Treaty with India as in that event, India would presumably play her part in the defence of the Commonwealth in the same way as other members". Cunningham immediately seconded Ismay's opinion. Monteath again disagreed saying that Indian independence had not been as gradual as Canada's and that a treaty would be necessary.

With the fat now in the fire, October saw the Chiefs' of Staff initiative derailed and the India Office counterattacking. The Chiefs' of Staff papers on the strategic importance of India were considered at the Defence Committee meeting on 2 October. Montgomery speaking for the Chiefs of Staff again affirmed their conviction of the importance of persuading India to remain in the Commonwealth. Monteath, treading cautiously, suggested that India might adopt external and defence policies similar to Eire in which case it would be essential to have a treaty to obtain Britain's strategic requirements. Attlee expressed the long range hope that India would

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48. JP(46)125(Revised Final), CAB 84/82 considered at COS(46)146th Mtg, Min 3, CAB 79/52.

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ATTLEE THE CHIEFS OF STAFF AND THE RESTRUCTURING OF  
COMMONWEALTH DEFENCE (U) AIR FORCE INST OF TECH  
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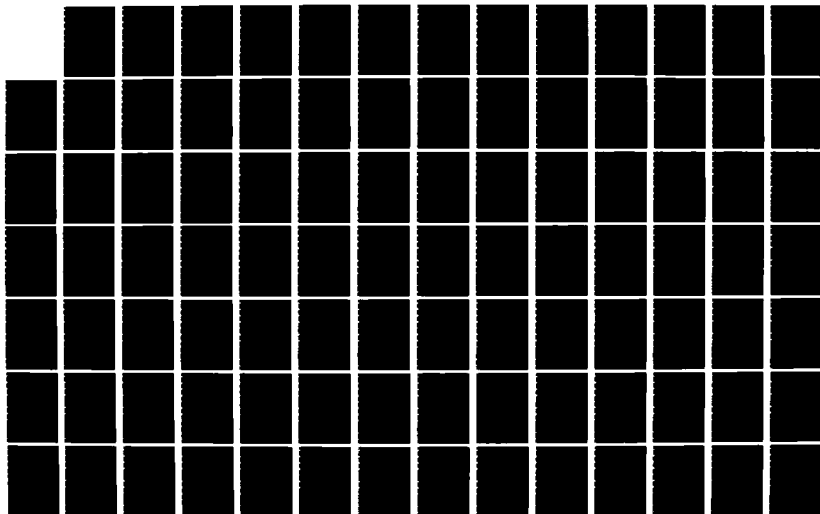
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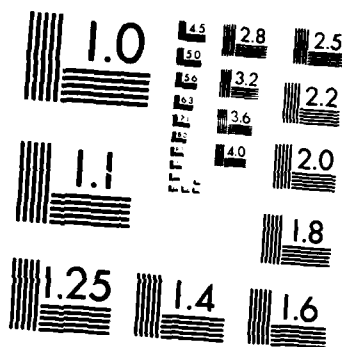
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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS 1963-A



eventually "accept responsibility for the security of regions immediately adjacent to her frontiers", but summed up that as there was no executive action that could be taken on the Chiefs' of Staff papers it would be sufficient for the Committee to take note. Whether the Chiefs' of Staff had accomplished anything through their initiative must remain a matter for speculation. They had succeeded in their immediate goal of bringing the issue to the attention of Attlee and there the matter lay.

Having sized up the opposition, the India Office prepared its counterattack by first closing ranks. On 4 October, F. F. Turnbull, of the India Office, drafted an internal minute in the form of a proposed letter from Monteath to Sir Eric Machtig, Permanent Under-Secretary of the Dominions Office.<sup>49</sup> Turnbull's letter, his ballon d'essai as he referred to it in his cover note, came right to the point. "The first question for consideration is whether it would be in the interests of the Commonwealth as a whole that India should remain within it". On 10 October Sir Gilbert Laithwaite, of the Burma Office, gave an equivocal response to Turnbull's minute, but its general tone was negative.<sup>50</sup> He questioned whether India might not prove to be like Italy as a member of the Triple Alliance before World War I and thus unreliable at a moment of crisis. He also deplored any weakening of allegiance to the crown. There could be no doubt, however, about the position of Mr. K. Anderson of the India Office in his response on 14 October.<sup>51</sup> "I see no reason to suppose that India

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49. T.O.P., Vol VIII, No. 409, pp. 662-7.

50. T.O.P., Vol VIII, No. 425, pp. 888-91.

51. T.O.P., Vol VIII, No. 466, pp. 714-5.

(which is essentially different from the Dominions in history, geographical position, culture, population, economic development etc.) will accept, or be naturally fitted to carry out, any of the broad unwritten obligations of membership". On a point that would have struck very close to home had it been presented to the Chiefs of Staff, he questioned, "how do the Chiefs of Staff reconcile their wishful thinking about India's place in the Empire defence system with the fact that they are already taking tacit steps to reduce India's access to information etc?".

With this apparent internal consensus, Monteath again addressed the issue directly to the Chiefs of Staff. Replying to a letter from Hollis that had again stressed the importance that the Chiefs of Staff attached to maintaining India within the Commonwealth, Monteath made a strong argument that future relations with India should be governed by a treaty.<sup>52</sup> He argued that India might break up, and even if it remained unified, it would be uncertain whether or not Britain would enjoy the same co-operation that it shared with the other dominions. He therefore argued strongly that British defence requirements with India should be put on a treaty basis. The Chiefs of Staff did not respond to this letter until 22 November, when they again reiterated their position favouring maintaining India in the Commonwealth as the best means of securing future defence needs.<sup>53</sup>

Meanwhile the India Office set about the task of acquiring allies. On 8 November Monteath wrote letters to Machtig, Sir George

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52. 31 October 1946, T.O.P., Vol VIII, No. 537, pp. 849-52.

53. COS(46)170th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 79/53.

Gater, the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Colonial Office, and Sir Orme Sargent, the Permanent Under-Secretary of the Foreign Office. Enclosing a copy of Hollis's letter, Monteath clearly laid out the lines of battle:

You will see that the present view of the Chiefs of Staff is that it is of the first importance to retain India within the Commonwealth. We think that it is unlikely that India will wish to remain within the Commonwealth at any rate as at present constituted, and we are doubtful whether it would be in the general interests of the Commonwealth to induce India to stay in the Commonwealth if this were possible.<sup>54</sup>

Machtig's reply on 22 November offered little comfort. "Our general view would be that it would be in the interests of the British Commonwealth that India should remain in it". The contempt that the India Office had for this reply is evident from the derogatory comments scribbled in the margins by the Monteath, Turnbull and Sir William Croft, Deputy Under-Secretary at the India Office. Croft penned, "V[ery] unimpressive manoeuvring for position I sh[oul]d think."<sup>55</sup> The Colonial Office response was more congenial to the India Office view. Gater responded on 6 December, ". . . it would be in the best interests of the Colonial Empire if India were not pressed to remain in the Commonwealth."<sup>56</sup> Sargent's response from the Foreign Office reflected its close collaboration with the Chiefs of Staff. Sargent noted:

. . . it would undoubtedly be of great advantage if India

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54. T.O.P., Vol IX, No 17, pp. 31-3.

55. T.O.P., Vol IX, No 75, pp. 136-8. Comments by the India Office are listed in the footnotes. Croft's comment is in footnote 6 p. 138.

56. T.O.P., Vol IX, No 171, pp. 304-6.

could remain in the Commonwealth, since her departure will be universally interpreted as a blow to British authority and prestige and as a diminution in the political, military and economic strength of the Commonwealth as a whole.

Commenting further on the arguments put forward by the Chiefs of Staff on the importance of Indian manpower, he said:

. . .the Chiefs of Staff appear to recognise that we could not hope in a written agreement to stipulate that we should be able to use Indian manpower in case of war as we have done hitherto. Indeed, if India were to give such an undertaking she would be committing herself far further than she would be called upon to do if she were a Dominion within the Commonwealth.<sup>57</sup>

Thus the flexibility of the Commonwealth relationship seemed to the Foreign Office as to the Chiefs of Staff to offer much more room to manoeuvre than a formal treaty.

The India Office's counter-offensive against the Chiefs of Staff would seem to have been blunted, when on 22 January 1947 it was given new life by the resolution of the Indian Constituent Assembly "to proclaim India as an independent sovereign Republic". The India Office now reopened its attack with a draft Cabinet paper that listed both the pros and cons of Indian membership in the Commonwealth. The cons, however, outnumbered the pros by six to four in the India Office's count. Monteath sent this memorandum with an appropriate cover letter again to the Colonial, Dominions and Foreign Offices.<sup>58</sup> The statement by the India Constituent Assembly and the reasoned approach of this new India Office attack created a favourable response. At a meeting held at the India Office on 11 March, the senior officials of the

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57. 7 December 1946, T.O.P., Vol IX, No 173, pp. 307-9.

58. 3 February 1947, T.O.P., Vol IX, No 338, pp. 602-9.

Dominions Office, Colonial Office and Foreign Office all fell roughly into line with the India Office position. The desire to avoid repeating Britain's unfortunate relationship with Eire seems to have weighed heavily on both the Dominions and Foreign Offices. The India Office's tide, however, broke against the unmovable rock of Lord Ismay. Ismay had retired as Chief Staff Officer to the Minister of Defence the previous November, but he had been called back to duty as the Chief of Staff to Lord Mountbatten, the Viceroy designate. Ismay's stature and skill at working the Whitehall machine appears to have single-handedly blocked the submission of this draft to ministers. Ismay told the meeting:

He did not agree with paragraph 8 of the proposed Cabinet memorandum which argued that a Treaty would be more reliable than a Commonwealth relationship. . . . He thought it would be mistaken to put up a paper to Ministers in which the objections to India coming into the Commonwealth were presented as equal to if not outweighing the advantages.<sup>59</sup>

After continued debate the meeting agreed that the draft paper was not appropriate for submission to ministers.<sup>60</sup>

That Lord Ismay was on the side of the angels, or more appropriately that he had the Prime Minister in his corner, can be seen in a sequel to this episode. In early May, Attlee launched his own assault in favour of maintaining India in the Commonwealth. In a lengthy minute addressed to the Lord President, the Foreign Secretary, the President of the Board of Trade, the Minister of Defence, the Lord

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59. T.O.P., Vol IX, No 522, pp. 918.

60. For a slightly different account of this battle between the Chiefs of Staff and the India Office see R. J. Moore, Escape from Empire: The Attlee Government and the India Problem, (Oxford, 1983) pp. 224-232.

Chancellor, and the Dominions and Colonial Secretaries<sup>61</sup> on 14 May, he argued what was needed was not a debate by constitutional lawyers but a political decision. "What I think is required is the finding of a formula which will enable the greatest number of independent units to adhere to the Commonwealth without excessive uniformity in their internal constitutions or in their relationship to Great Britain."<sup>62</sup> This minute shows Attlee trying to set in motion his concept of the Commonwealth as a global institution with the widest possible representation. As such it could serve as a model for international co-operation. It does not take any great leap into fantasy to see that such an organization could potentially help maintain Britain's influence in the postwar world. In seeing the Commonwealth as a means of preserving British influence in the world, Attlee's ideas fell closely into line with those of the Chiefs of Staff. Though they might differ sharply over the details of Indian independence, Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff stood as one when it came to the importance of India remaining in the Commonwealth. Both saw it as an essential means of maintaining Britain's position as a world power.

While the Chiefs of Staff argued forcefully for preserving India as a member of the Commonwealth, one aspect of India's full participation in the Commonwealth proved extremely difficult for them to come to grips with. This was the issue of security and it persistently manifested itself in the question of the attendance of

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61. It should be noted that the Secretary of State for India was not consulted.

62. M221/47, CAB 21/2278.

Indian students at the Imperial Defence College. General Slim, the Commandant of the IDC, first raised this issue with the Chiefs of Staff on 11 December 1946.<sup>63</sup> The Chiefs of Staff had previously agreed with the Prime Minister that classified information should continue to be passed to India only so far as necessary to meet India's immediate needs.<sup>64</sup> The problem was that information well beyond that needed for the defence of India would be available to Indian students at the IDC. Information on atomic energy, new weapons and the basis and organization of intelligence organizations were examples of the types of sensitive information dealt with. Slim expressed particular concern over Indian civil servants whom he thought lacked the same degree of loyalty as members of the Indian armed forces. The Chiefs of Staff decided to stick with their past decision of allowing Indian students to attend British staff colleges including the Imperial Defence College, but to keep this decision under review.

The issue cropped up again on 23 December as rumors that India might decide to leave the Commonwealth prompted Montgomery to propose that if that occurred Indian students might be allowed to attend the staff colleges of the individual services, but not the Joint Services Staff College (JSSC) or the Imperial Defence College.<sup>65</sup> Montgomery returned to the attack on 29 January after Nehru's formal announcement that India would seek to become a sovereign independent republic.<sup>66</sup>

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63. COS(46)181st Mtg, Min 5, CAB 79/54.

64. COS(46)153rd Mtg, Min 4, CAB 79/52.

65. COS(46)186th Mtg, Min 3, CAB 79/54.

66. COS(47)16th Mtg, Min 6, DEFE 4/1.

The other two Chiefs of Staff agreed with his position that it would now be necessary to exclude the attendance of Indian students from certain lectures at the IDC, but also attempted to tone down Montgomery's attack by seeking the advice of the Minister of Defence.

This issue was the first item on the agenda at their Staff Conference with Alexander on 31 January.<sup>67</sup> Alexander argued strongly against taking any action that might have a negative impact on current political negotiations in India. The committee agreed not to take precipitate action, but to reopen the issue of attendance by Indian students at future courses and to discuss the problem privately with United States military authorities. The reason for this last item was that much of the classified information the Chiefs of Staff were concerned about came from U.S. sources and was given on the understanding that it would not be divulged to third parties. Thus, we see for the first time one of issues that would increasingly cause problems for British military authorities in the postwar era: the conflict between the need for American co-operation and the attempt to build Commonwealth unity.

On 24 March the Chiefs of Staff were informed that Attlee and Bevin had approved of their decision not to offer invitations to Indian students to future courses at the IDC and the JSSC. The issue was far from dead though. In June the Chiefs of Staff learned that the India Office favoured the attendance of Indian students at these colleges.<sup>68</sup> The Chiefs of Staff instructed General Hollis to inform

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67. COS(47)18th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/1.

68. COS(47)80th Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/5.



the Prime Minister that they stood by their previous agreement. On 4 July, however, the Chiefs of Staff were informed that Attlee had agreed with the India Office's position and decided that it would be unwise to exclude Indian students.<sup>69</sup> Attlee's reversal of his previous decision is part of the maelstrom that seized the entire British government in the final month and a half before Indian independence. Before following the fateful events of these last six weeks of the Raj on Britain's postwar strategy, the impact of the Mountbatten viceroyalty and the strategic importance of the Andaman and Nicobar islands needs to be traced.

With a past that included participation on the Chiefs of Staff Committee as the Chief of Combined Operations as well as Supreme Allied Commander of the South East Asian Theatre during the war, Mountbatten could be expected to be sensitive to the issues of strategy involved in the transfer of power in India. Before departing as Viceroy he made a point of consulting the Chiefs of Staff to obtain their views. He met the Chiefs of Staff directly on 5 March and at an ad hoc meeting of ministers on 18 March.<sup>70</sup> In both of these meetings the primary concern was the technical aspects of maintaining control in India until power had been effectively transferred. The implicit assumption was that which the Chiefs of Staff had long endorsed: if India remained in the Commonwealth then Britain's strategic interests would be protected. The Chiefs' of Staff paper tabled at the meeting

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69. COS(47)84th Mtg, Min 5, Ibid.

70. COS(47)36th Mtg, DEFE 4/2 and T.O.P., Vol IX, No. 487, pp. 856-63; MISC/M(47)8, 18 March 1947, T.O.P., Vol IX, No. 545, pp. 982-5.

of ministers stated clearly:

If power is transferred to a united and friendly India within the Commonwealth, we should expect India to be prepared to play her part in the same way as other members of the Commonwealth. In these circumstances general co-operation in defence matters should be simpler.<sup>71</sup>

Mountbatten shared this faith in the Commonwealth, seeing the Commonwealth as a progressive element in Britain's line of march as a great power. In his initial interviews with several prominent Indians he took the line that opinion in the British government was moving towards excluding India from the Commonwealth and he was one of the few who supported keeping India in the Commonwealth.<sup>72</sup> He also used the ploy that India would lose the assistance of all British military personnel if the decision was made to leave the Commonwealth.<sup>73</sup> When the idea of using the grant of dominion status as a means of quickly transferring power began to take shape in May, Mountbatten clearly spelled out the advantages for the United Kingdom:

(iii) A request by India to remain in the Commonwealth would enhance British prestige enormously in the eyes of the world. This factor alone was of overriding importance.

(v) From the point of view of Empire defence an India within the Commonwealth filled in the whole framework of world strategy; a neutral India would leave a gap which would complicate the problem enormously; an hostile India would mean that Australia and New Zealand were virtually cut off.<sup>74</sup>

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71. COS(47)59(0), 18 March 1947, T.O.P., Vol IX, No. 544, pp. 974-81.

72. See interviews with Sir C. Trivedi, 15 April 1947 and with Krishna Menon, 17 April 1947 in T.O.P., Vol X, Nos. 150 and 169, pp. 260-1 and 310-3 respectively.

73. Interview with Sardar Baldev Singh, 16 April 1947, T.O.P., Vol X, No. 161, pp. 284-6.

74. Minutes of Viceroy's Ninth Staff Meeting, Item 5, 9 May 1947, T.O.P., Vol X, No. 366, pp. 703-4.

Mountbatten's thinking on the importance of maintaining India within the Commonwealth was undoubtedly reinforced by his choice of Ismay as his chief of staff. Ismay's role in setting the Chiefs of Staff attitude towards Indian independence has already been noted. Ismay appears to have played an important role in drafting Attlee's personal letter of instructions to Mountbatten.<sup>75</sup> Credit for injecting the ideas on retaining India in the Commonwealth and securing British defence interests as objectives for the Mountbatten viceroyalty seems to belong to Ismay,<sup>76</sup> though Mountbatten claims credit for this himself.<sup>77</sup>

Ismay and Mountbatten formed a strong team with Ismay's steadying counsel helping to direct Mountbatten's exuberance. When the Chiefs of Staff balked because they considered Mountbatten's flamboyance was leading to an unsound solution to Indian independence, their confidence in Ismay saved the day. The esteem of both Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff for Ismay played an important role in the success of the Mountbatten viceroyalty. Together Mountbatten and Ismay followed the approach of seeking first to achieve Indian independence within the Commonwealth and to leave the securing of British defence needs to negotiations following independence. As we shall see, this approach commended itself to Attlee, while the Chiefs of Staff wavered in

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75. M134/47, 18 March 1947, CAB 21/2278; also T.O.P., Vol IX, No. 543, pp. 972-4.

76. Moore, Escape from Empire, p. 223.

77. Marginal note by Mountbatten to the record of his interview of Krishna Menon, 17 April 1947, T.O.P., Vol X, No. 169, footnote 2, p. 313.

their commitment to it as the reality of Indian independence approached.

One of the issues that served to weaken the confidence of the Chiefs of Staff in the Mountbatten/Ismay approach was the future status of the Andaman and Nicobar islands. The Chiefs of Staff considered these islands in the Bay of Bengal, that were formally part of the Presidency of Madras, to be vital staging posts for Commonwealth communications in the Indian Ocean area. The importance of these islands had been raised in the discussions between Mountbatten and the Chiefs of Staff before his departure for India.<sup>78</sup> Mountbatten himself affirmed their strategic importance at a meeting of ministers before his departure.<sup>79</sup> Once in India, Mountbatten treated the strategic importance of these islands in the same manner as he proposed to handle all other items of strategic importance. If India remained within the Commonwealth there would be no need to address the issue directly, so no action was necessary until the issue of India's remaining in the Commonwealth had been decided.<sup>80</sup> The India Office officials, however, ran true to form on this issue. They opposed relying on Indian goodwill; if the islands were strategically vital their disposition should be secured in the instrument of transfer of power.<sup>81</sup> On this issue the India Office found themselves

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78. COS(47)36th Mtg, 5 March 1947, DEFE 4/2 and T.O.P., Vol IX, No. 487, pp. 856-63.

79. GEN 174/1st Mtg, Min 2, T.O.P., Vol IX, No. 530, p. 941.

80. Minutes of Viceroy's 24th Staff Mtg, 1 May 1947, T.O.P., Vol X, No. 272, pp. 523-5.

81. India Office minutes, 10-11 June 1947, T.O.P., Vol XI, No. 132, pp. 253-5.

on the same side of the barricades as the Chiefs of Staff for in June 1947 the Chiefs of Staff shifted to a harder line on securing their strategic requirements before the transfer of power in India.

The reason for the Chiefs of Staff shift to a hard line in June 1947 has several antecedents. In November 1946 General Ismay retired as Chief Staff Officer to the Minister of Defence and thus his smoothing influence over their fears was removed. Another reason was the role played by Lieutenant General Frank Simpson, the VCIGS, who served to focus the reservations of the Chiefs of Staff on the transfer of power process. Finally, their level of confidence was undoubtedly shaken when they discovered that they were being excluded from key decisions in the transfer of power process.

Following the Defence Committee meeting of 2 October 1946, aside from their dueling with the India Office at the official level, the Chiefs of Staff had not been a party to any of the governmental decisions being taken over India's future status. As events of the unfolding drama appeared in the press the fact that they were not being consulted must have become apparent. Simpson spelled out his own frustration at this situation in a personal letter to General Sir Geoffrey Scoones, the chief of the War Staff at the India Office:

I think it a pity that the military view on the actual paper has not been asked for before it is finalised. Procedure of this sort does not make for that trust between Ministries which is so necessary if the Government machinery is to work smoothly and adequately.

All I suggest is that, if you get the opportunity, you should make it clear to anyone concerned that the Chiefs of Staff will come down like a ton of bricks in a very clear and definite statement if there is any suggestion at

any time that they have been properly consulted on matters of this sort. They know they are not being consulted and will not hesitate to say so.<sup>82</sup>

Thus the Chiefs of Staff only learned on 19 February 1947, the day before Attlee's scheduled announcement, of Mountbatten's viceroyalty and Britain's planned departure from India by June 1948.<sup>83</sup> Prior to the normal Chiefs of Staff meeting that day, Alexander met with them to show them a telegram from Sir Frederick Burrows, the governor of Bengal. Burrows's telegram said he feared the planned announcement by the government would lead to wide-scale unrest. General Simpson then told the other Chiefs of Staff of a confidential briefing he had been given by Auchinleck in December expressing the same sort of doubts as Burrows. The Chiefs of Staff instructed Group Captain D.C. Stapleton of their secretariat to write a minute expressing their concern. The minute was addressed to Alexander, but the intent was that he could show it to Attlee.<sup>84</sup> As a result, it appears that Attlee detained the Chiefs of Staff after the Staff Conference that had previously been scheduled for that afternoon, to have a special discussion of the Indian situation. Both Attlee and Bevin were profoundly shaken by the authoritative appraisals of the prospect of serious unrest in India. Attlee had decided to postpone the announcement when Pethick Lawrence, the Secretary of State for

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82. Letter from Simpson to Scoones, 7 February 1947, L/WS/1/1048, IORL.

83. The narration of the following events is primarily drawn from Philip Warner, Auchinleck: The Lonely Soldier, (London, 1981) pp. 276-8. For a more detailed explanation of the events of this day and sources see Appendix I.

84. Stapleton to Alexander, Minute COS 207/7, 19 February 1947, T.O.P., Vol IX, No. 432, pp. 766.

India, objected that Wavell had already been authorized to tell Nehru and Jinnah of the pending announcement that afternoon. "Attlee shrugged his shoulders and said 'So be it'."<sup>85</sup> The muddle of 19 February was to be repeated on a much grander scale in the final dash towards Indian independence.

The decent into the maelstrom began from the Chiefs of Staff point of view when they considered a draft of the Indian Dominions Bill on 13 June.<sup>86</sup> Simpson again led the attack. "Since the draft Indian Dominions Bill, did not deal specifically with our military requirements, he [Simpson] suggested that the India Office might be requested to advise how our military requirements were to be obtained". On 16 June the Vice Chiefs of Staff returned to the Indian Dominions Bill.<sup>87</sup> They considered a JPS Report that took a hard line on the future of the Laccadive Islands.

Since we cannot assume that the successor States in India, even if they remain Dominions, will give us continued and full co-operation in the provision of the necessary facilities for the air transport route to the Far East, we must re-ensure by means of an alternative.

. . .

We therefore conclude that legislative provision should be made for the transfer of the Laccadive Islands from the Government of Madras to the administration of H.M.G. in the United Kingdom.<sup>88</sup>

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85. Warner, Auchinleck, p. 278.

86. COS(47)75th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/4.

87. COS(47)76th Mtg, Min 4, DEFE 4/4 and T.O.P., Vol XI, No. 221, pp. 432-4.

88. JP(47)87(Final), DEFE 6/2.

In discussion Major General Ward expanded this position to cover the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. With the cold reality of Indian independence staring them in the face, the Chiefs of Staff took a giant step towards agreeing with the India Office position that they had so long opposed. The reason for this volte face by the Chiefs of Staff was their concern, as we shall see shortly, that dominion status as a temporary expedient for granting independence would leave them with the worst of all worlds. The new dominions might leave the Commonwealth soon after independence and leave Britain with no means of obtaining its strategic requirements. In some areas like air transit facilities this could have a dramatic impact upon Britain's strategic capabilities. In his minute to the Minister of Defence drafted after the meeting, General Hollis clearly stated that the Chiefs of Staff now favoured some type of formal arrangement to protect British strategic interests.<sup>89</sup> In this matter they proposed to again approach the India Office.

If the Chiefs of Staff had hoped to be greeted with open arms by their long time adversary they were sorely disappointed. It appears that the India Office at this juncture was being strongly pushed to accept the Mountbatten/Ismaay solution to the problem of transferring power in India. At their meeting on 27 June, the Vice Chiefs of Staff faced a strange demand from the India Office. They were asked to again specify their strategic requirements in India with the caveat that they should not ask for the same things that they had asked for previously.<sup>90</sup> When the Vice Chiefs protested that this seemed to be a

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89. Minute from Hollis to Minister of Defence, 16 June 1947, DEFE 4/4.

90. COS(47)80th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/5.



very muddled request, the Indian Office representative, General Scoones, lamely agreed. On 30 June the Chiefs of Staff sought to bypass the India Office and go direct to the Viceroy with their concerns.<sup>91</sup> As a result General Hollis minuted Alexander on 1 July expressing the Chiefs' of Staff concerns and providing a memorandum for Alexander to present to the India and Burma Committee with the Chiefs' of Staff request to seek the Viceroy's advice.<sup>92</sup> When the Chiefs of Staff returned to this issue on 2 July, Hollis again minuted Alexander:

We have now reached a dangerous stage where we are merely "hoping" that the new Dominions will be willing to enter into conversations with us about questions in the Defence field. The Chiefs of Staff feel that we really ought to try and pin the new Dominions down to a much more definite line of approach to these problems.<sup>93</sup>

The India and Burma Committee approved the Chiefs' of Staff request on 3 July.<sup>94</sup> As a result, Lord Listowel, the new Secretary of State for India, wrote Mountbatten the same day:

It is of the greatest importance to ensure that, in the struggle to resolve the political difficulties of the future of India, the question of some form of military agreement runs no risk of being allowed to go by default. The fact that we do not arrange formal Treaties with Dominions must not blind us to the necessity for taking early concrete steps to obtain our defence requirements should, at a later date, either Pakistan or Hindustan decide to leave the Commonwealth. It may, in fact, be desirable to have written agreements with these temporary Dominions.<sup>95</sup>

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91. COS(47)81st Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/5.

92. COS(47)81st Mtg, Annex I, Ibid.

93. COS(47)82nd Mtg, Min 6, Annex, Ibid.

94. IB(47)40th Mtg, Min 1, T.O.P., Vol XI, No. 486, pp. 866-7.

95. Telegram Listowel to Mountbatten, T.O.P., Vol XI, No. 487, pp. 872.

Meanwhile, Mountbatten was tacking in the opposite direction. On 5 July he sent a telegram to Listowel saying that he wanted the issue of the Andaman and Nicobar islands excluded from the India Independence Bill.<sup>96</sup> The issue could be decided later. Responding directly to Listowel's telegram of the third, Mountbatten replied in the same vein that it would be inexpedient to attempt defence negotiations at the present time.<sup>97</sup> He also took exception to the term "temporary Dominions". He recommended that the Chiefs of Staff prepare to send a delegation to India after the transfer of power.

Mountbatten's response led to the Chiefs' of Staff pot boiling over at their meeting on 9 July. In a letter presented to the committee, Cunningham opened with a broadside: "The Viceroy has raised objections to discussing our requirements, for reasons which I consider to have no weight".<sup>98</sup> Cunningham argued that defence negotiations should begin prior to 15 August because delay might lead the Indian leaders to think that the British government attached little importance to these issues and also because prior to that date the "Viceroy is the supreme authority, and both sides sit at his table, after that date he, and the British Service representatives, are outsiders." Cunningham's position was seconded by Simpson and Air Marshal Sir William Dickson in turn. Ismay, who was back in London at the time, sought to mollify the Chiefs of Staff by offering to submit

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96. T.O.P., Vol XI, No. 536, pp. 938-9.

97. T.O.P., Vol XI, No. 556, pp. 962-3.

98. COS(47)86th Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/5 and T.O.P., Vol XII, No. 41, pp. 43-9.

to the Prime Minister a draft telegram for the Viceroy discussing the latest draft by the Chiefs of Staff of Britain's strategic requirements in India.

Discussion of the transfer of power again dominated the Chiefs' of Staff meeting on 16 July.<sup>99</sup> The Chiefs of Staff were informed that Attlee had ruled against sending the telegram to the Viceroy that Ismay had suggested. While seeking to educate the Chiefs of Staff about the current overriding political difficulties in India, Ismay also sought to appease them by suggesting that they should provide him with their views on the manner of approaching the new dominions on defence requirements. This was agreed. The Chiefs of Staff also took aim on Attlee's decision to allow the admission of Indian students to British staff colleges. Cunningham suggested that the matter was so serious that it should be referred to a Staff Conference with the Prime Minister.

He thought that they [the Americans] would regard any discussion of information from U.S. sources at the Staff Colleges and other establishments attended by Indian students as a most serious breach of our agreement with them; this would almost certainly lead to a considerable reduction in the flow of information from American sources to us. Indeed, our relations with the U.S. might be so prejudiced as seriously to affect our Commonwealth defence policy.

This statement not only explains the reason why the Chiefs of Staff attached so much importance to the question of the admission of Indian students to the staff colleges, but it also makes clear the interconnection between Commonwealth defence and the support of the United States.

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99. COS(47)88th Mtg, Min 1,2,3,4 and 6, DEFE 4/5.

The Staff Conference between Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff over the admission of Indian students to the staff colleges took place on 21 July.<sup>100</sup> The importance of the issue was obvious to both Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff. Attlee opened saying, ". . . once Commonwealth status had been granted to India and Pakistan, it was politically impossible to prevent facilities being placed at the disposal of these two Dominions when other Dominions had access to them." Tedder summing up the Chiefs' of Staff position said, "Bearing in mind the already agreed statement that American support was essential to the British Commonwealth in a major war, the issue appeared to be whether we were to risk forfeiture of American co-operation or offending the new Indian Dominions." He offered a compromise saying might it not be possible to at least defer the issue for a year or two by pleading administrative difficulties. Attlee immediately grasped the solution saying that the new governments would obviously want to wait until they had had time to complete the re-organization of their armed forces before they addressed the issue of picking suitable candidates. Thus the problem of Indian attendance at United Kingdom service schools was solved for the immediate future to the satisfaction of both Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff. The Chiefs agreed with Attlee to the principle that places should be provided for Indian students at the service schools, while achieving their immediate objective of blocking their attendance for the present.

The Vice Chiefs of Staff considered the draft brief prepared for Ismay at their meeting on 18 July.<sup>101</sup> Simpson led the discussion

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100. COS(47)90th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 5/4 and T.O.P., Vol XII, No. 197, pp. 287-8.

101. COS(47)89th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/5.

saying that he didn't think that the draft covered the requirements outlined at the meeting with Ismay on 16 July.

He thought that the approach to the Indian leaders should cover the following points:-

(a) They should be made to realise . . . the very weak strategic position in which they were about to find themselves.

(b) The importance to us and the Commonwealth as a whole that we attached to the maintenance of the strength of India and Pakistan.

(c) The strength that comes from the ability to call on the resources of the Commonwealth should again be made clear;

(d) They should then be made aware of what will be our strategic requirements if the strength of the rest of the Commonwealth was able to support India and Pakistan, and if these two countries were to play their part in the maintenance of the strength of the Commonwealth on which in the last resort, their continued peace and independence must depend.

The committee agreed that the secretary should redraft the brief for Ismay along these lines. In its redrafted form it was approved by the Vice Chiefs of Staff at their meeting on 21 July.<sup>102</sup> On 24 July Attlee approved Listowel sending the revised draft "as a guide to Ismay".<sup>103</sup>

In effect the Chiefs of Staff had put their faith in Ismay and Mountbatten to secure Britain's strategic interests in the new dominions. For their part Ismay and Mountbatten pinned their hopes on the functioning of the Joint Defence Council in India under Mountbatten's chairmanship. Over the next several months the Chiefs of Staff confined their concern for South Asia to preparations for the

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102. COS(47)91st Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/5.

103. T.O.P., Vol XII, No. 219, note 3, p. 315.

planned defence talks with the new dominions.

In analysing the impact of Indian independence on Britain's postwar strategy the basic goal of both Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff since the Cabinet Mission had been to maintain the Indian successor state or states within the Commonwealth. This had been achieved, but as we have seen not in a manner that was totally to the Chiefs of Staff liking. For the Chiefs of Staff the possibility of the new nations being temporary dominions was a matter of grave concern. For them the Commonwealth was a state of mind and not something that one adhered to as a temporary expedient. Risking such a ploy might leave Britain shortly with no connection with these two new countries. They were, however, somewhat salved by the knowledge that it was highly probable that Pakistan would desire to maintain the Commonwealth connection and in so doing would discourage India from severing the connection also. For Attlee, as a politician concerned with the art of the possible, Indian independence must have appeared as a great success. Britain had come out of the Raj with a reasonable amount of goodwill and the task of defining Britain's relations with the new dominions was still in progress. Strategically Indian independence had been neither a great defeat nor a victory. It was a manoeuvre that had required Britain to yield a certain amount of territory. Whether this would prove to be a tactical withdrawal reducing commitments or a disastrous retreat that had yielded valuable resources was not entirely clear. It was both and only the future would tell which side of the coin landed up.

#### Linking the Colonial Empire with Commonwealth Defence

Alongside the large strategic deposits held on account in the

Middle East and India, the colonial empire seemed to be small change. Nevertheless, colonial issues occupied a fair amount of the Chiefs of Staff time, particularly if one includes the colonies of other powers. Having just come through a global war, the Chiefs of Staff naturally thought in global terms and in the late 1940s great swaths of the globe were still incorporated into colonial empires. The Labour Government was also committed to colonial development. Development of the colonial empire had strategic repercussions. While the Chiefs of Staff did not concern themselves directly with the specifics of colonial development, they were concerned to fit the colonial empire into the overall sweep of Commonwealth defence.

The ability of the Chiefs of Staff to co-ordinate strategic planning for the colonial empire was, however, made difficult by the Chiefs' of Staff inability to establish effective liaison with the Colonial Office in the first years after the war. The first Colonial Office officials did not appear at a Chiefs of Staff Committee meeting after the war until March 1947 when they were present for a discussion of the imposition of martial law in Palestine. Prior to that date officials from the Foreign Office, Dominions Office, India Office, Treasury, Cabinet Office, Ministry of Transport, Ministry of Supply and Home Office had all attended Chiefs of Staff Committee meetings.

To fully appreciate the lack of co-ordination between the country's top strategists and the denizens of the Colonial Office, it is worth a brief digression to compare the co-ordination that existed between the Chiefs of Staff and the Foreign Office and the India Office. The close wartime liaison already discussed between the Foreign Office and the Chiefs of Staff continued to grow after the

war. At the top the Chiefs of Staff saw Bevin as their staunchest supporter in the government. "A tower of strength to the defence services during this difficult period was the late Ernest Bevin, then Foreign Secretary . . .".<sup>104</sup> He gave advice to successive Chiefs of the Imperial General Staff, Alanbrooke, Montgomery and Slim.<sup>105</sup> On occasion he sought their advice.<sup>106</sup> It was below this level that the real co-ordination of the two organizations took place on a daily basis, however. The Foreign Office had a Service Liaison Department whose head worked directly under the Permanent Under-Secretary. The incumbent to this position chaired the JIC and sat with the JPS. From September 1946 to November 1949 this position was held by William Hayter. Through his experiences with the planning organizations of the Chiefs of Staff, he won approval for the establishment of a small planning section in the Foreign Office that has continued to be used by subsequent Foreign Secretaries.<sup>107</sup> Nor was co-ordination between the two organizations limited to this official channel. Eighty different Foreign Office officials attended meetings of the Chiefs of Staff between VJ Day and the start of the Korean War. The Chiefs of Staff thus had the benefit of Foreign Office expertise in virtually all areas. The close liaison between the Foreign Office and the

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104. L. C. Hollis, One Marine's Tale, (London, 1956), p. 154.

105. Alan Bullock, Ernest Bevin: Foreign Secretary, (London, 1984), p. 57.

106. At COS(45)219th Mtg, Min 22 Bevin invited and the Chiefs of Staff accepted his invitation to come to the Foreign Office on 12 September 1945 to discuss Middle East policy, CAB 79/38.

107. William Hayter, A Double Life, (London, 1974), pp. 82-3 and expanded upon in a personal interview 2 October 1985.



Chiefs of Staff so impressed Mr. Ray Hare, the U.S. State Department official who came to negotiate the tripartite agreement on arms sales in the Middle East in May 1950, that he informed the Foreign Office that he planned to write a special report on it.<sup>108</sup>

Similarly, for all their antagonism, the India Office and the Chiefs of Staff maintained close personal contact. This was partially a function of the liaison between the War Staff in the India Office and the Service Departments, but India Office officials also attended Chiefs' of Staff meetings when items on the agenda related to India. We have also seen that India Office officials co-operated with the JPS in drafting military clauses in case a treaty was used to secure Indian independence.<sup>109</sup>

Between the Colonial Office and the Chiefs of Staff no such personal linkages existed. The Chiefs of Staff considered many issues that required co-ordination with the Colonial Office, but this co-ordination was accomplished through the exchange of memoranda. It was partially to address the need for greater co-ordination between the services and the Colonial Office that Attlee ordered the reconstruction of the Overseas Defence Committee in August 1946.<sup>110</sup> An attempt by the JPS to establish links of its own with the Colonial Office in January 1947, however, met with a cold shoulder. The Secretary of the JPS had written the Colonial Office on 16 January:

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108. COS(50)88th Mtg, Min 4, DEFE 32.

109. See p. 88 above.

110. DO(47)29, "Overseas Defence Committee - Constitution and Regulations", 27 March 1947, CAB 131/4.

As you know, the Colonial Office frequently find themselves obliged to ask the opinion of the Chiefs of Staff on various subjects, and the result of this is that the Joint Planning Staff are from time to time faced with a very difficult problem on which they have to express an urgent view, when it really would be more satisfactory if they could take a bit longer and do a more thorough examination. This situation is nobody's fault . . .<sup>111</sup>

After such a tactful lead, Mallaby went on to suggest that he would appreciate it if it were possible for Acheson to inform him of problems the Colonial Office was working on that might have strategic implications. He suggested examples such as trusteeship agreements or constitutional plans. As a result of Mallaby's letter, a meeting was scheduled for 31 January. But on that day it was cancelled by Acheson. By 23 May no meeting had yet taken place. On 27 May Acheson wrote an internal memo saying that Mallaby had decided to drop the matter. In penning this minute Acheson seemed impervious to the obvious scorn in Mallaby's reply.

They [JPS] would naturally be glad if they could be warned in advance of any difficult problems on which they or the Chiefs of Staff may be called upon to advise in the future, e.g. if it had been possible (and Mr. Mallaby did not for a moment suggest it was possible) for the Colonial Office to have foreseen the recent important question relating to Ceylon which was referred to the Chiefs of Staff, that would have been helpful. [On 30 April the JPS had been tasked to provide a report not later than 5 May giving a military assessment of granting independence to Ceylon.]<sup>112</sup> . . . But he made it clear that the Joint Planners while appreciating any help on these lines which can be given do not propose to ask for it.

I think that all that is necessary is for this Paper to be circulated to the Assistant Secretaries in charge of the Geographical departments who will perhaps try to bear the matter in mind.<sup>113</sup>

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111. Letter from Mallaby to Acheson, 16 January 1947, CO 537/1973.

112. COS(47)59th Mtg, Min 10, DEFE 4/4.

113. Internal Colonial Office minute, CO 537/1973.

That is exactly all that did happen; the paper was circulated, initialed and died. Thus the Colonial Office appeared not to be influenced by either cajolery or derision. In the immediate postwar years they were to stand apart from the behind the scenes communication and contact that enabled the Chiefs of Staff organization to play such an effective syncretic function with respect to His Majesty's Government's external policy.

Lack of close co-operation with the Colonial Office did not, however, prevent the Chiefs of Staff from working to incorporate the colonial empire into Commonwealth defence. Throughout 1946 and 1947 they moved ahead steadily if slowly on the issue of the establishment of local defence committees in the colonies. They first considered this issue on 12 June 1946.<sup>114</sup> The JPS report called for the establishment of an inter-service committee consisting of the local commanders in all colonies where there were two or more services and the establishment of a defence committee under the chairmanship of a local political official. The report was approved and forwarded to the Colonial Office and the Burma Office. The Chiefs of Staff refined their approach on this issue on 19 September 1946.<sup>115</sup> Colonies with two or more services represented were divided into four groups. These groups were respectively: Malta, Cyprus Aden, Kenya, Bermuda and Gibraltar; the Malayan Union and Singapore; Gold Coast, Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Gambia; and Palestine. For the first group the report again recommended the establishment of local defence committees and

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114. JP(46)102(Final), CAB 84/81, considered at COS(46)92nd Mtg, Min 3, CAB 79/49.

115. JP(46)171(Final), CAB 84/84, considered at COS(46)142nd Mtg, Min 1, CAB 79/52.

was approved for despatch to those colonial governors to get their response. The second group would be covered by the Defence Committee, South East Asia, which was already in existence. The forces in those colonies in the third group were considered too small to require defence committees. The political situation in Palestine made any change in current arrangements inappropriate. After receiving the response of the colonial governors concerned, the Chiefs of Staff forwarded a revised report to the Colonial Office and the Commanders-in-Chief, South East Asia and Middle East. This last report added the advice that defence issues in East Africa should be handled at East African Governors Conferences, assisted by appropriate service advisers. This attempt to standardize procedures throughout the colonial empire, while still allowing a considerable degree of variation, shows the difference between the approach of the Chiefs of Staff and the Colonial Office which had historically treated the colonies as air tight compartments.

Attlee's primary concern about the role to be played by the colonies in Commonwealth defence revolved around the possibility of raising colonial manpower to reduce the manpower burden on the United Kingdom. As early as 21 January 1946 he had raised this issue in the Defence Committee.<sup>116</sup> Attlee cast his net wide asking Service Ministers to consider the use of Gurkhas, Africans, Poles or others to reduce the manpower shortage resulting from Britain's postwar commitments.<sup>117</sup> In replying the services opposed the idea of foreign

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116. DO(46)3rd Mtg, Min 5, CAB 131/1.

117. M17/46, Attlee Minute to Service Ministers, 18 January 1946, CAB 21/2277.

nationals in the British forces, but agreed to consider the greater use of colonial forces.<sup>118</sup> The Colonial Office continued the debate with a paper on the Future of East and West African Forces issued at the end of May.<sup>119</sup> The Colonial Office paper called for maintaining these forces at levels high enough to ensure internal stability and a nucleus for expansion in time of emergency. The Chiefs of Staff readily endorsed this position. The question was who was to foot the bill.<sup>120</sup> On the issue of finance, the War Office was adamant:

The point I wish to make clear is that the size of the African Forces must be limited to that which the funds available from Colonial revenues can maintain with the help of any contribution which the Chancellor of the Exchequer is prepared to make available on other than the Defence Votes.<sup>121</sup>

When the Defence Committee considered this issue on 7 August, the Chiefs of Staff expressed the view that these forces should be maintained at a level sufficient to maintain internal security and to provide the nucleus for expansion in time of war, but were unanimous in opposing the cost of these forces being born from defence expenditures.<sup>122</sup> The committee, however, ruled that the level of forces required as a nucleus for wartime expansion over and above those required for internal security should be borne by the defence vote. As a breakdown of figures for the forces required for each of

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118. DO(46)26,28 and 29, CAB 131/2 considered at DO(46)7th Mtg, Min 4, CAB 131/1.

119. DO(46)72, 30 May 1946, CAB 131/3.

120. COS(46)85th Mtg, Min 15, CAB 79/48.

121. DO(47)100, 3 August 1947, CAB 131/3.

122. DO(46)24th Mtg, Min 5, CAB 131/1.

these commitments was not available, the Colonial Office and the services were instructed to continue to study this issue.

The need for the Colonial Office and the services to work together on this issue appears to be the reason for Attlee ordering the reconstruction of the Overseas Defence Committee in August 1946. The committee completed its report, "The Role of the Colonies in War", on 11 April 1947.<sup>123</sup> The report was forty-four pages long and went through the colonial empire colony by colony examining their defence positions. When the report came before the Defence Committee on 16 May the issue of finance was still paramount:

It was important to keep in mind the financial aspect of the contribution of the Colonies to Commonwealth defence and this was linked with the question whether Colonies should be expected to equip forces only for the defence of their own territories or on the more elaborate and costly scale to enable them to be used elsewhere.<sup>124</sup>

While the report was approved as a preliminary position on the role to be played by the colonies in war, the issue was left open for further discussion pending future developments in Commonwealth defence policy.

#### An Approved Defence Policy

The reason for the concern over future developments in Commonwealth defence policy at the Defence Committee meeting on 16 May 1947 was that the Chiefs of Staff were in the final stages of completing a document entitled "Future Defence Policy". Once approved, this document, became the basis for all the British government's strategic decisions for the next three years.

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123. DO(47)37, CAB 131/4.

124. DO(47)13th Mtg, Min 2, CAB 131/5.

As far back as 21 June 1946 the Chiefs of Staff had called for the creation of a Future Planning Staff under the JPS to undertake long range planning.<sup>125</sup> The Future Planning Staff had completed its report on 31 March 1947.<sup>126</sup> The Chiefs of Staff had then commenced a seven week process in which they in conjunction with the JPS had produced a document suitable to present to ministers. The report was nearly finished at the time of the Defence Committee meeting on 16 May.

At their meeting on 21 May the Chiefs of Staff approved the document for submission to the Defence Committee.<sup>127</sup> The document was considered too sensitive to be aired before the entire Defence Committee.<sup>128</sup> Attlee agreed to Alexander's suggestion that the document should be considered by a Staff Conference.<sup>129</sup> The Staff Conference held on 11 June 1947 approved DO(47)44 as the basis for Britain's defence policy.<sup>130</sup> The paper highlights the centrality of the Commonwealth in British postwar strategy.<sup>131</sup> It is divided into

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125. COS(46)96th Mtg, Min 8, CAB 79/49.

126. JP(46)146(Final), withheld, CAB 84/83, considered at COS(47)48th Mtg, Min 2, 2 April 1947, DEFE 4/3. For a detailed discussion of this report see Lewis, "British Military Planning", pp. 302-24.

127. DO(47)44. For a discussion of sources see Appendix II.

128. For the report's sensitivity see M274/47, Minute from Attlee to Secretary of State for Air, 8 July 47, CAB 21/2278. Text quoted in Appendix II.

129. See M241/47, Minute from Attlee to Alexander, 8 June 1947, CAB 21/2278.

130. COS(47)74th Mtg, Min 1, withheld, DEFE 4/4.

131. This aspect of DO(47)44 is not addressed in Lewis's thesis as his main interests are the evolution of a British anti-Soviet policy and the development of weapons of mass destruction.

two parts: "Commonwealth Defence Policy" and "The Strategy for Commonwealth Defence".

At the conclusion of part one, paragraph thirty-three lists "Fundamentals of Our Defence Policy". This is a classic fusion of the strategic ideas of Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff as hammered out in their discussions since the end of the war. Subparagraph "a" states,

The supreme object of British policy is to prevent war, provided that this can be done without prejudicing our vital interests. This entails support of the United Nations and ability to defend our own interests.

One could hardly want a more concise statement of Attlee's views as expressed in The Labour Party in Perspective and adapted to the postwar world. Paragraphs "b" and "c" stated respectively that the most formidable threat was from Russia, especially after 1956, and that the best way of preventing war was preparedness. Paragraph "d" then listed the essential measures to ensure survival and victory in the event of war. Among these items were:

(ii) Maintaining the united front of the British Commonwealth and doing everything possible to ensure that in the event of war we have the immediate and active support of all its members.

(iii) Ensuring that we have the active and early support of the United States of America and of the Western European States.

(v) Actively opposing the spread of Russian influence by adopting a firm attitude to further Russian territorial and ideological expansion, particularly in all areas of strategic value to the defence of the British Commonwealth.

(vi) Arresting by all possible means the deterioration that has already begun in our position and prestige in the Middle East . . .

(viii) Being prepared to take offensive air action from the outset since the war will rapidly reach a climax and



the endurance of the United Kingdom cannot be guaranteed for any considerable period against attacks by modern weapons of mass destruction. The best bases for this offensive action are the United Kingdom, Middle East and if possible North-West India.

In part II, "The Strategy of Commonwealth Defence", paragraph thirty-six lists what the Chiefs of Staff referred to as the three pillars of Commonwealth defence: defence of the United Kingdom, control of essential sea communications and a firm hold on the Middle East. To these three pillars, they added a fourth, "which though not essential would give a most desirable addition of strength", the co-operation of India. The three pillars of Commonwealth defence had been elaborated by the Chiefs of Staff as far back as December 1946 in their initial discussions with Alexander as Minister of Defence and also with Attlee at the final debate over maintaining Britain's position in the Middle East.<sup>132</sup> Each of these three pillars had its own raison d'etre. The United Kingdom contained "sixty percent of white man-power and industrial capacity of the Commonwealth and the bulk of her scientific development". Sea communications were the interstitial tissue of the Commonwealth and Britain's lifeline. The Middle East provided the most viable location for bases from which to launch a punitive air offensive against the Soviet Union. In contrast to bombers launched from East Anglia, those launched from the Middle East would not have to cross miles of Soviet occupied territory to reach their targets. Once they crossed into Soviet territory, they would immediately have access to the majority of Soviet oil production then located in the Caucasus and to the newly developed industrial

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132. COS(46)187th Mtg, Min 1, 23 December 1946, CAB 79/54, and COS(47)9th Mtg, Min 2, 13 January 1947, DEFE 4/1.

area of the trans-Caucasus. Those who would see the Chiefs of Staff advocacy of Britain maintaining its position in the Middle East in out-moded terms of the route to India, of Victorian sentimentality or of not giving up something once held miss the point. Alongside the other reasons for Britain maintaining its position in that region, the Chiefs of Staff were firmly nailed to the cross of the Middle East by considerations of military capabilities.

DO(47)44 clearly highlights the British view of the central features of Commonwealth defence by mid 1947. These were the importance of the Middle East and the need for co-operation with the dominions and the United States. The co-operation of India was also to be sought if possible. It should be noted that the solitary mention of the colonial empire in the report refers to East Africa's usefulness as a location for strategic reserves. The mention of Western Europe is also worth noting. While the report listed the co-operation of Western Europe in the same sentence as the co-operation of the United States, the role envisaged was that of a sacrificial lamb rather than a full-fledged ally.

There is now, however, no combination of European Powers capable of standing up to Russia on land, nor do we think that the probable military capabilities of an association of European States at present justify us in relying upon such an association for our defence.

Nevertheless, any time which we can gain to improve our defences would be of such value that every effort should be made to organise an association of Western European Powers, which would at least delay the enemy's advance across Europe.<sup>133</sup>

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133. Paragraph 12, DO(47)44.

Thus British strategic interests in mid 1947 were focused outside of Europe on the dominions, the United States and the Middle East. These were the three props of Commonwealth defence even though in legalistic terms the latter two had no real connection with the Commonwealth.

#### Commonwealth Defence Co-operation

At the time of DO(47)44, neither Britain's position in the Middle East nor her defence relations with the the United States seemed at all secure. Some allowance might be made for the fact that bringing these two "into the Commonwealth" would take time. The "old dominions", however, formed part of anyone's definition of the Commonwealth. If one was to have a viable Commonwealth defence one would anticipate that their co-operation must be essential. British policy makers had carefully tilled the ground of future defence co-operation in the Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1946. As they watched for new blooms between June 1946 and September 1947, they must certainly have been disappointed at the slow rate of growth.

There is ample evidence of the frustration of British policy makers over the reluctance of the dominions to take the bait. As an example, Attlee, in a minute to Addison, gave full vent to his fury after a discussion of the British Commonwealth Occupation Force in Japan that had occurred in the Defence Committee:

These Governments have taken a most active part in the discussion of the peace treaties. Dr. Evatt in particular has been most vigorous in pushing his point of view - the right of Australia to a big say in international affairs. Yet with the exception of the small force in Japan these Governments make no contributions to the burden of

providing troops of occupation, but are quite prepared for us to pay the piper - for them to call the tune.<sup>134</sup>

On 20 November 1946, General Ismay raised the issue with the Chiefs of Staff commenting that since the end of the Prime Ministers' Meeting in May, only New Zealand had made a formal proposal for implementing the defence liaison system.<sup>135</sup> Ismay cautioned the Chiefs of Staff against making any public statements that might in the dominions be interpreted as coercion. As usual the individual most likely to feel that the British government was coercing him was the Canadian Prime Minister, Mr. Mackenzie King. He had been upset by comments made by the former CIGS, Lord Alanbrooke, to the Royal Empire Society.<sup>136</sup> As was often the case, suitable stroking seemed to placate Mackenzie King's ire and the Chiefs of Staff were duly informed on 30 December that the Canadian government had agreed to the establishment of a Canadian Liaison Staff in London.<sup>137</sup> Thus the status of the defence liaison system at the end of 1946, seven months after the Prime Ministers' Meeting was that only two of the dominions had formally approved the establishment of the system.

Meanwhile, in anticipation of a positive reception from the dominions on establishing the system, the Chiefs of Staff had

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134. M366/46, Minute Attlee to Addison, 24 October 1946, CAB 21/2277.

135. COS(46)169th Mtg, Min 10, CAB 79/53.

136. DO(46)34th Mtg, Min 2, 11 December 1946, CAB 131/1.

137. COS(46)189th Mtg, Min 3, CAB 79/54. For the Canadian side of this story see Fayrs, In Defence of Canada, Vol. III, p. 223-5.

instructed the JPS to prepare a report on its implementation.<sup>138</sup> The Chiefs of Staff approved this report on 20 January 1947.<sup>139</sup> The gravamen of the report was the hope that once the system came into operation it would require expansion. Thus the limited functions of the service liaison system from the British point of view were seen as the proverbial foot in the door.

The creation of the Service Liaison Staffs in 1947 was anything but a smooth ride. New Zealand asked that the actual appointment of a British liaison staff be delayed till the end of the year for domestic political reasons.<sup>140</sup> Australia stirred up a hornets' nest by opposing the "trinity" system in which each of the services was represented by an officer of equal rank. They wanted one officer to be the head of the liaison team and have subordinates from the other two services attached to his staff. This request set off a row between the Chief of the Air Staff and the First Sea Lord on the one side and the War Office and Montgomery on the other. Montgomery was touring Australia and New Zealand during most of this debate in June and July and continually fired scorching telegrams back to his

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138. COS(46)183rd Mtg, Min 2, CAB 79/54.

139. JP(46)227(Final), CAB 84/86, considered at COS(47)13th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/1. Starting in 1947 JPS reports are generally appended to the Chiefs' of Staff minutes at which they were discussed as they had been in 1945. Due to differences in vetting, however, a report will sometimes be withheld from one source, but not from the other. This report is a case in point. It is withheld from the Chiefs' of Staff records, but not from the JPS records. For the remainder of this thesis if only the DEFE 4 source is given for a JPS report discussed at a Chiefs' of Staff meeting the report is available with the minutes.

140. COS(47)87, 23 July 1947, DEFE 5/2.

colleagues. Twice the Chiefs of Staff called on Attlee to referee this debate in Staff Conferences.<sup>141</sup> Despite the fact that the other two chiefs had worked out a compromise with Attlee, Montgomery re-opened the issue on 13 August after his return to London.<sup>142</sup> Hollis managed to work out yet another compromise. When the Chiefs of Staff again considered this issue on 20 August, Montgomery accepted the latest draft letter from Attlee to the Australian Prime Minister and the secretary was instructed to report on what further decisions were required to establish liaison staffs in Canada, New Zealand and South Africa.<sup>143</sup> Thus on 25 August the Vice Chiefs of Staff got a full rundown on the status of the service liaison system a year and four months after its creation had been tentatively endorsed by dominion Prime Ministers.<sup>144</sup> The grim truth was that despite various agreements no where was the system in operation. On 25 August, the Chiefs of Staff finally issued directives for the establishment of missions to Canada and South Africa, agreed to defer the directive for New Zealand until the end of the year and to await the reply of the Australian Prime Minister to the latest letter from Attlee before issuing the directive for Australia.

From the end of the Prime Ministers' Meeting in May 1946 through September 1947, the development of Commonwealth defence had been in

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141. COS(47)83rd Mtg, 2 July 1947, and COS(47)95th Mtg, Min 4, 28 July 1947, both in DEFE 4/5.

142. COS(47)103rd Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/6.

143. COS(47)106th Mtg, Min 4, Ibid.

144. COS(47)110th Mtg, Min 9, Ibid.

slow motion. The system designed to establish postwar co-operation with the old dominions was still in the process of coming into existence. While the Chiefs of Staff had finally secured the official acceptance of their views on the importance of the Middle East, Britain still lacked a secure base in the region. In the continuing saga Egypt took its case against the 1936 Anglo/Egyptian Treaty to the United Nations in August 1947. For the moment the Chiefs of Staff realized the importance of lying low, hoping that the storm would pass. In India, Britain had come out with a fair amount of honour and with two new dominions in the Commonwealth bag. Whether these new dominions would long remain there, or even remain on good terms with Britain remained to be seen. The colonial empire had not been looked to for immediate strength, but the Chiefs of Staff had their reasons for doubting whether under the Colonial Office it was in the best hands even for long term development. Finally, the largest and indispensable prop for postwar Commonwealth defence was the co-operation of the United States. For two years since the end of the war co-operation over global strategy between Britain and the United States had been in limbo. With the convertibility crisis in August 1947 further undermining Britain's fragile economic recovery, the restructuring of Commonwealth defence had not only been in slow motion, but was in danger of collapsing.

## Chapter 5: The American Stimulus: September 1947 - October 1948

Against the bleak background of post-independence massacres in India, financial crisis at home and Egypt taking its case against the 1936 Anglo/Egyptian Treaty to the United Nations, Bevin's initiative to co-ordinate British and American policy in the Middle East was either a stroke of genius or a display of unbounded bravado. Indeed, it was a bit of both. Its bravado was typified by the first objective of the draft steering brief: "To enlighten the Americans on the importance of the Middle East to the United States as well as to the United Kingdom and on British achievements and present policy in the area".<sup>1</sup> Its genius stems from the fact that it opened the door for the realization of the Anglo/American strategic co-operation that the British Chiefs of Staff had hoped for since the end of the war. The Washington Talks on the Middle East<sup>2</sup> in October 1947 initiated a new era in Anglo/American defence co-operation in peacetime.

### Talks on the Middle East in Washington

The British Chiefs of Staff focused their desire for continued co-operation with the Americans after the war on continuing the

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1. Minute from Bevin to Attlee, 9 October 1947, ME/47/15, FO 800/476.

2. These talks are the same as those referred to by Roger Louis in The British Empire in the Middle East, pp. 109-12 and throughout the volumes of Foreign Relations of the United States as the "Pentagon Talks". As the British Chiefs' of Staff documents refer to them as the "Washington Talks" that is the designation that I will use.



institution of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. It seems natural that they should have looked to an organization that had proved so successful at co-ordinating wartime strategy between the two countries. The Combined Chiefs of Staff consisted of the Chiefs of Staff of both countries supported by a series of joint committees. When the two groups of chiefs were not meeting in plenary session, the British Chiefs of Staff were represented in Washington by the heads of the British Joint Staff Mission [B.J.S.M.] there.

Scarcely a month after VJ Day on 27 September 1945, the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff approved a JPS report on retention of the Combined Chiefs of Staff.<sup>3</sup> The report said the retention of the Combined Chiefs was desirable, but doubted whether the Americans would be willing to carry on as they placed great faith in the Military Staff Committee of the United Nations. It recommended against pressuring the American chiefs on this issue. The Vice Chief of the Naval Staff suggested stronger wording:

The C.C.S. may admittedly become redundant if the Security Council and Military Staff Committee develop as intended. Meanwhile the continuance of Anglo-U.S. collaboration is in our view an essential reinsurance.

This amendment was agreed.

The Chiefs of Staff returned the issue of military collaboration with the United States and the continuation of the Combined Chiefs of Staff periodically.<sup>4</sup> The theme in all of these meetings was the

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3. JP(45)242(Final) considered at COS(45)235th Mtg, Min 3, CAB 79/39.

4. COS(46)10th Mtg, Min 3, 18 January 1946, CAB 79/43; COS(46)37th Mtg, Min 2, 8 March 1946, CAB 79/45; COS(46)81st Mtg, Min 6, 22 May 1946, CAB 79/48; and COS(46)91st Mtg, Min 1, 11 June 1946, CAB 79/49.

desire on the British part to maintain the wartime level of co-operation and apparent American indifference to this proposal. At a Staff Conference on 19 February 1947, Bevin apparently in a moment of pique over U.S. vacillation on this issue demanded that the continued existence of the Combined Chiefs of Staff either be made public or that it be disbanded.<sup>5</sup> The Chiefs of Staff countered that if it was disbanded it would be necessary to find some other means of collaboration. They suggested having Field Marshal Wilson, the Head of the B.J.S.M., ask General Eisenhower about the prospect of American political pressure being brought to bear to end it. Attlee adopted the middle course allowing the Chiefs of Staff to make their enquiry, but stipulating that if a decision was reached about the continuation of the Combined Chiefs of Staff it should be publicly as frank as possible.

Following up this meeting, Brigadier C.R. Price, the secretary of the B.J.S.M., returned to London for a detailed discussion with the Chiefs of Staff on 26 March.<sup>6</sup> Price reported that the Combined Chiefs of Staff had not held an official meeting for over a year. However the Joint Staff Mission was able to carry on general co-ordination with the the U.S. services. The problem was that as soon as the peace treaty with Italy was signed the main part of the Combined Chiefs' business would be complete and therefore it would be hard to justify its continued existence if this was challenged in either Congress or Parliament. The sensitivity of the American Chiefs of Staff resulted

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5. COS(47)29th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/2.

6. COS(47)45th Mtg, Min 3, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/3.

from just such a political challenge six months previous when they and the President had had to defend its continued existence on the grounds of remaining allied commitments. The American Chiefs of Staff desired maintaining the Combined Chiefs of Staff, but felt they must tread carefully. Price suggested that, even if the Combined Chiefs of Staff were abolished, so long as the Joint Staff Mission remained effective co-ordination could be maintained. Sir John Cunningham pointed out that as the Joint Staff Mission was a subordinate part of the Combined Chiefs of Staff organization its existence would be even harder to justify in terms of dollar expenditure if the Combined Chiefs of Staff ceased to exist. The result was that the Chiefs of Staff on both side of the Atlantic decided to lay low and hope for a more favourable political climate.

Into this atmosphere stultified by a lack of political will on the western side of the Atlantic, Bevin's initiative to hold wide ranging talks with the Americans came as a cool summer breeze. Bevin realized that political will was at the heart of the problem. When the Americans suggested the talks should first take place on a purely military basis, he declined saying that the political and military should be coupled.<sup>7</sup> The Chiefs of Staff jumped at the chance to participate when Bevin sent them an invitation. Continuing problems in Greece and American involvement there under the Truman Doctrine had created the opportunity. The invitation is mentioned in the Chiefs' of Staff minutes under an item entitled "Aid to Greece".<sup>8</sup> As the

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7. COS(47)198(0), 19 September 1947, DEFE 5/6.

8. COS(47)19th Mtg, Min 4, 12 September 1947, DEFE 4/7.

Americans desired that the Chiefs' of Staff representative should be someone who would not be likely to be noted by the American press, they chose General Hollis. The JPS prepared a lengthy and detailed brief covering British strategic requirements from Italy to Pakistan. From the JPS's point of view the goal of the talks was simply to get the ball rolling.

It is not possible at this stage to translate policy into definite military plans. If the general line of policy and strategy can be agreed with the Americans, the military plans can come later . . .<sup>9</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff approved this brief at their meeting on 30 September.<sup>10</sup>

The talks could not have been more successful from the British point of view. Bevin minuted Attlee on 18 November, "I need not underline the extent to which the Commonwealth in the Middle East would be strengthened if the United States Government adopt this policy".<sup>11</sup> In the same minute, Bevin also suggested that Attlee might like to discuss the results of the talks at a Staff Conference.

Attlee agreed with Bevin's advice and held a Staff Conference on 21 November attended by Bevin, Cripps,<sup>12</sup> Alexander, the Chiefs of Staff, Michael Wright of the Foreign Office and Hollis.<sup>13</sup> Bevin opened

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9. JP(47)130, 30 September 1947, withheld in DEFE 6/3, but available in CAB 21/2086.

10. COS(47)122 Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/7.

11. ME/47/21, FO 800/476.

12. Sir Stafford Cripps had become Chancellor of the Exchequer as a result of Hugh Dalton's resignation on 14 November 1947.

13. COS(47)144th Mtg, DEFE 4/8, also FO 800/476.

by explaining the importance of the talks. If the Staff Conference approved the record of the Washington Talks, it would not constitute a formal accord between the two governments. It would be merely a statement of shared principles covering economic, cultural and strategic policy. The essence of these shared principles was American endorsement of the importance of the British position in the Middle East. Alexander after praising Bevin for initiating the talks stated that "Before any detailed planning could proceed, it would be essential to obtain from the United States an estimate of the time that would elapse between the outbreak of hostilities in the Middle East and the time at which we could expect to receive effective American assistance". Cripps after acknowledging the value of the discussions and particularly the value of the freedom of action left to both of the two governments made the prescient observation ". . . H.M.G. could not easily expect the United States to agree to carry out such a policy unless H.M.G. indicated to them determination to maintain our strong strategic, political and economic position in the Middle East and Eastern Mediterranean within the limits of her resources". The truth of Cripps' observation would be borne out in the following years as British policy makers felt that they must hang on to their position in the Middle East to meet American expectations. The Chiefs of Staff said only that the agreement conformed to their strategic intentions. Bevin returned to Cripps' comment saying that, "The U.S. Government wished to be assured that we regarded the Middle East as an area vital to the defence of the British Commonwealth; that we should continue to do so; and that we should take the necessary steps to this end". He went on to say that

he looked forward to close collaboration with the United States in this region and "He would have no objection to the continuation of combined military discussions, provided they were conducted under conditions of strict secrecy". He concluded by asking permission to inform both Smuts and Mackenzie King, who were both currently in the United Kingdom, of the outcome of the talks. The Staff Conference concluded by approving the identical record of the talks and giving Bevin permission to inform both Smuts and Mackenzie King. Most importantly for the Chiefs of Staff the meeting authorized that "the planning necessary to fulfill this policy could proceed".

The importance of this Staff Conference can hardly be over emphasized. With the approval of the record of the talks at the Staff Conference, and the parallel approval by the National Security Council in Washington, two years of postwar doldrums in Anglo/American strategic collaboration had ended. One of the essential ingredients for Commonwealth defence had at one stroke become a reality. Combined military planning would soon stretch far beyond the confines of the Middle East. No mention of these talks or the agreement to begin combined planning seems to have been made in either the Defence Committee or the Cabinet. Like the approval of an official defence policy five months prior, critical decisions had been taken by a select group of ministers sitting with the Chiefs of Staff. The decisions made at the Staff Conference on 21 November 1947 was of fundamental importance for the development of postwar Commonwealth defence.

On 26 November, the Chiefs of Staff instructed the JPS "to give

further consideration to our wartime deployment in the Middle East for subsequent discussions with the Americans", and instructed General Hollis to prepare a draft communication for the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East to inform them of the outcome of the Washington talks.<sup>14</sup> General Morgan, the head of the B.J.S.M. in Washington, in conferring with the Chiefs of Staff on 12 December also stressed the need to maintain the momentum in US/UK joint planning that the success of the Washington talks had made possible.<sup>15</sup> The American stimulus that was to dominate British strategic planning for the next ten months was becoming evident.

In the meantime, Bevin had approached the Canadian and South African Prime Ministers, both of whom were in London for the wedding of Princess Elizabeth, to inform them of the results of the talks. "Both Mr. Mackenzie King and Field-Marshal Smuts expressed satisfaction with the result of the conversations and said that they fully understood the need for secrecy".<sup>16</sup> The results of the Washington talks again placed the British government in a position to exploit its special relationship with the United States vis-a-vis the dominions.

The Chiefs of Staff had also made use of the royal wedding as a chance to further strategic ends. The JPS had prepared a paper titled "World Strategic Summary for Use in Informal Discussions with

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14. COS(47)147th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/9.

15. COS(47)153rd Mtg, Min 1, Ibid.

16. Note by P.J. Dixon, 27 November 1947, ME/47/26, FO 800/476.

Commonwealth Representatives".<sup>17</sup> This paper is a revised version of DO(47)44 tailored for Commonwealth representatives. The two sections of this paper instead of being titled "Commonwealth Defence Policy" and "The Strategy of Commonwealth Defence" are titled respectively "Future Defence Policy" and "Our Defence Strategy". The same fundamentals of defence policy mentioned in discussing DO(47)44 are listed verbatim as are the three pillars of Commonwealth defence. There are two interesting differences in this paper from the previous one, however. One is a realistic appraisal of Britain's weaknesses in being able to fulfill the strategy outlined in the paper:

It is clear, however, that within acceptable financial limits it will be extremely difficult for us to maintain sufficient forces in peace to allow us to implement the policy outlined in this paper. We are now engaged on an urgent examination of how far we can hope to do so.<sup>18</sup>

This chastened realism probably reflects both the impact of the sterling crisis in August as well as an attempt to win greater sympathy from the dominions.

#### Commonwealth Defence and the Continental Commitment

The stimulus of combined planning with the United States very quickly forced the Chiefs of Staff to face some difficult issues. Undoubtedly the most important of these was Britain's attitude towards the defence of Western Europe. As already mentioned in the discussion

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17. JP(47)139(Final) considered at COS(47)134th Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/8. Only Annex II is available. The report is withheld in DEFE 6/4 and is listed as withheld in DEFE 4/8, but only the cover letter and annex I are removed.

18. Paragraph 28, JP((47)139(Final), Ibid.



of DO(47)44, the Chiefs of Staff held little hope that any combination of European states had the strength to oppose Soviet aggression in Europe. They had so far framed Commonwealth defence in terms that largely excluded serious consideration of the defence of Western Europe. Despite Attlee's attempts to use the defence of Western Europe as a fulcrum to pry the Chiefs of Staff out of the Middle East during their arguments in 1946, his views on Commonwealth defence and a continental commitment were not far removed from those of the Chiefs of Staff. Discussing the postwar settlement in Europe, Attlee had written the War Cabinet in 1943, "The conclusion is that in the interests of solidarity of the British Commonwealth, we should hesitate to enter, without the United States, into any military guarantee of the Locarno type, i.e., a Continental obligation not shared by the Dominions."<sup>19</sup> The Chiefs of Staff might now achieve Attlee's solution by gaining the support of the United States, but to do so they must very carefully marshall their arguments. Indeed between January and March 1948, future talks with the Americans seemed to hang on British policy makers finding an agreed approach to present to the Americans over the defence of Western Europe.

This issue of a continental commitment in relation to planning with the United States first raised its head on 14 January 1948 when the Chiefs of Staff considered a JPS paper "Subjects for Discussion with the Americans".<sup>20</sup> The JPS recommended starting in the Far East and working through the Middle East to Europe in future planning

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19. WP(43)321, 19 July 1943, CAB 66/39.

20. JP(48)4(Final) considered at COS(48)7th Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/10.

discussions with the Americans. The Chiefs of Staff argued that problems in Europe were far more pressing and required urgent attention. On 30 January the Chiefs of Staff squarely faced the issue in considering the JPS paper "Discussion on Policy for Western Europe".<sup>21</sup> The JPS paper bluntly reaffirmed the position that any attempt to hold Western Europe had little chance of success at least prior to 1957. It might be possible to maintain a foothold in Western Europe, but that would depend on the contribution that the Americans were willing to make. The report concluded, "that from our point of view the best strategy appears to be the air strategy, since that gives us the best chance of preventing war and achieving ultimate victory and provides for at least some support to the countries of Western Europe".

The Chiefs of Staff returned to this discussion at their meeting on 2 February.<sup>22</sup> In a lengthy discussion the battle lines were clearly drawn. According to Montgomery, "The Meeting broke up in disorder".<sup>23</sup> Tedder and Cunningham on the one side firmly adhered to DO(47)44 and argued that reinforcements sent to aid continental allies in the event of a Russian attack would be squandered. Montgomery on the other argued that he considered it essential that Britain show support for her continental allies by making a firm commitment to support them with ground and air forces in the event of a Russian attack on Western Europe. Because of the grave political questions

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21. JP(48)16(Final) considered at COS(48)15th Mtg, Min 1, Ibid.

22. COS(48)16th Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, Ibid.

23. Montgomery, Memoirs, p.500.

involved in adopting either policy, they did succeed in agreeing that the whole issue should be discussed with the appropriate ministers.

On 4 February the Chiefs of Staff met with Attlee, Bevin and Alexander in a Staff Conference.<sup>24</sup> Attlee asked each of the Chiefs of Staff to speak first and they in turn sketched the positions that they had taken at the previous meeting. Attlee then offered his own opinion that was decidedly opposed to a continental commitment. He said that he thought that the Chiefs of Staff had endorsed the position that the primary counter-offensive was to be launched from the Middle East. He doubted whether Britain had the resources to accomplish that mission as well as aid its continental allies. He also observed that continental commitments seemed invariably to grow once they were entered into. Bevin argued idealistically that the nationalistic barriers among the Western European countries needed to be broken down and greater co-operation established. Defence was just one aspect of this problem. On the practical side he announced that he had requested that the pending military planning talks in Washington be called off for the time being on the grounds that the Americans were still trying to determine their own strategy. In terms of overall Commonwealth defence, the Chiefs of Staff reiterated that they:

. . . had always held that immediate and full support by America was essential in any future war. Furthermore we ought to look to the Dominions for greater contributions. The idea that the United Kingdom could bear the main burden was no longer tenable.

The conference ended with the Chiefs of Staff being instructed to

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24. COS(48)18th Mtg, DEFE 4/10.

continue to study the problem.

The Chiefs of Staff next discussion of this topic on 11 February has been withheld from public inspection.<sup>25</sup> By 17 March the efforts of Hollis seem to have laid the groundwork for a compromise.<sup>26</sup> The basis for the compromise was that all strategic decisions hinged on the level of American participation. Pending that level of participation being made clear, the Chiefs of Staff agreed to endorse the ambiguous compromise to defend Western Europe as far east as possible and to defend the Middle East. This position was approved at a Staff Conference with Attlee on 19 March and the paper embodying it was approved for Hollis to use as a brief for his talks in Washington.<sup>27</sup>

The debate was not yet over, however. At Chiefs' of Staff meetings on 22 March and again on 31 March, Montgomery tried to have his new VCIGS, Lieutenant General Gerald Templer,<sup>28</sup> block the departure of the JPS team to Washington until a firm commitment had been made to support Britain's continental allies.<sup>29</sup> On the latter occasion, Tedder fumed that the British might be closed out of American plans if they failed to take the Americans up on their

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25. COS(48)21st Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, withheld, Ibid.

26. COS(48)39th Mtg, Min 3, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/11.

27. COS(48)58(0), DEFE 5/10 considered at COS(48)42nd Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/11.

28. Templer had succeeded Simpson on 1 February 1948.

29. COS(48)43rd Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/11 and COS(48)46th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/12.

offer. After a telegram from Hollis already in Washington, Montgomery relented at the Chiefs of Staff meeting on 8 April and it was agreed that the JPS team should leave for Washington on 10 April.<sup>30</sup>

It is important to keep in mind the political developments in Europe that paralleled this debate by the Chiefs of Staff. On 22 January, a week after the Chiefs of Staff had directed the JPS to concentrate their consideration of future planning with the United States on the problems of Western Europe, Bevin had issued his invitation to France and the Benelux countries that was to lead to the creation of the Brussels Pact in March. Bevin's political initiative should again be seen as an attempt at coupling military and political co-ordination with the United States. On 26 January, Bevin had followed up his invitation to Britain's Western European allies with a request that the United States join them.<sup>31</sup> At the end of February the Czech coup had taken place making Russian intentions in Europe seem all the more ominous.

Against this background the need to obtain the active co-operation of the United States was all the more apparent. Yet from the very start combined planning with the United States proved to be a two edged sword in the formulation of Commonwealth defence. Co-operation with the Americans may have been a fundamental requirement, but it also required careful management to channel American plans in a direction that complimented rather than disrupted Commonwealth defence. The question of the level of both British and

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30. COS(48)49th Mtg, Min 11, Ibid.

31. Bullock, Bevin, p. 522.

American commitments to the defence of Western Europe is a case in point. British planners were soon to find out that American planners far from coming to their rescue in Europe were as disinclined to commitments as their British counterparts. With the Atlantic Ocean in between, they could also afford to be much more detached about the consequences of Western Europe being overrun. The question of a continental commitment was to become one of the major difficulties undermining the attempt to create a viable system of Commonwealth defence in the postwar world. Into this problem, the War Office jumped with both feet.

At the very time that the Chiefs of Staff wanted to present a united front to the Americans, Montgomery led the War Office in a campaign against his two colleagues and the Chiefs of Staff organization in general. In espousing a continental commitment he was also clearly reversing his own previously expressed views. At a Staff Conference with Alexander on 23 December 1946 Montgomery had said, "The old concept of operations involving the sending of forces to the Continent was virtually useless against an enemy who possessed almost unlimited man-power".<sup>32</sup> Even on presenting his paper<sup>33</sup> arguing for the assumption of a continental commitment he stated, "He did not dissent from the conclusions reached in D.O.(47) 44, but this policy must be taken a step further . . . ". As Attlee was quick to point out at the Staff Conference on 4 February, Britain did not have the resources for both a global strategy and a European strategy. Attlee

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32. COS(46)187th Min, Mtg 1, CAB 79/54.

33. COS(48)26(0), DEFE 5/10 considered at COS(48)16th Mtg, 2 February 1948, DEFE 4/10.

had foreseen this as far back as 1943. One cannot but question Montgomery's motives in this debate. On the surface he argued that it was not credible for Britain to expect her continental allies to bear the brunt of a Russian assault without the assurance that Britain would be fighting beside them with all means possible. Under the surface one reason behind Montgomery's arguments could have been his desire to win the lion's share of the defence vote for the army. The army had had the lion's share of the defence budget since the end of the war. As the First Sea Lord had pointed out in the Chiefs' of Staff debates over how to cut military spending during the sterling crisis in August 1947, army estimates were four and a half times greater than they had been in 1938, while the Royal Air Forces estimates were only three times as great and the Royal Navy's only twice as great.<sup>34</sup> The army claimed fifty-seven percent of estimates for the three services in the 1946 White Paper on Defence and forty-eight percent in that for 1947.<sup>35</sup> The reason for the army getting so large a portion of the defence budget was the nature of Britain's postwar commitments. In 1947 the army had large numbers of troops in Germany, Palestine and Egypt and was just in the process of withdrawing from India. The Royal Air Force and Royal Navy had, however, been cut back drastically on the grounds that no major war was expected before 1957 and that both of these services needed to be refitted with new weapons. As a case in point the Royal Air Force was deferring current spending to provide funds for the development of the V-bombers that were to become its strategic backbone from the

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34. COS(47)112th Min, 30 August 1947, DEFE 4/6.

35. Cmd. 6743 and 7042 respectively.

mid-1950s on. However, by early 1948 postwar commitments were finally coming to an end in many areas. The Army had already come out of India, was largely out of Greece and would be out of Palestine shortly. To justify its share of the defence budget a new raison d'etre had to be found. One could argue that this was the real reason behind Montgomery's espousal of a continental commitment. In fairness to Montgomery, however, one might argue that traditional British strategy had been hostile to any one power dominating the continent and this was the possibility that British strategic planners had to cope with in the late 1940s. But when Attlee had argued just this point in the debate over the Middle East in July 1946, the Chiefs of Staff had argued that it was more important to hold the Middle East than Europe and Montgomery had not dissented. Montgomery was not to win this debate himself, but as we shall see his views were ultimately to prevail.

#### Strategic Planning with the United States

The joint planning team's visit to Washington despite several delays meant that British intentions at the Washington talks on the Middle East in October of 1947 had been realized. Combined strategic planning between the United States and Britain in peacetime was now a reality. The most immediate result of the April talks was the production of parallel war plans for use in an emergency in the next twelve months. The British plan was code named Doublequick, and the Americans version was called Halfmoon.



The Chiefs of Staff discussed a preliminary report on plan Doublequick on 5 May.<sup>36</sup> The most interesting feature of the plan mentioned in discussion was the American plan to use Khartoum and Aden as heavy bomber bases. At last the Chiefs of Staff argument aired by Tedder back in April 1946 of holding the Middle East to provide heavy bomber bases for the United States appeared to have some substance to it. Continuing to stand out from his colleagues, Montgomery minimized the importance of plan Doublequick, saying that the real issue was preparations for war in 1957 and that to this end the Chiefs of Staff needed to again put the issue before ministers of making a definite commitment to support the defence of Western Europe.

Montgomery's continued sniping coupled with the desire to get a firm American commitment to the defence of Western Europe altered Britain's strategic terms of reference. British plans now had to be formulated taking into consideration both how they would appear to the Americans and to a lesser extent how they could be reconciled with Britain's new continental allies. As an example, when the Chiefs of Staff considered plan Doublequick at a Staff Conference with Alexander on 10 May, they altered it.<sup>37</sup> Rather than evacuating the British Army of the Rhine in the event of an attack as had been agreed with the Americans in Washington, they now decided that, "In the event of an emergency between now and the end of 1949, the policy should be that

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36. JP(48)47(Final), withheld, considered at COS(48)62nd Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/13.

37. COS(48)64th Mtg, Min 1, Ibid. Plan Doublequick itself, JP(48)48(Final), withheld in both DEFE 4/13 and DEFE 6/6, was withdrawn and a revised version circulated after this meeting as COS(48)110(0), withheld DEFE 5/11.

our forces on the Continent should stay and fight unless and until they were pushed out . . .". This compromise in favour of a limited continental commitment meant that while the American emergency plan called for an evacuation of American forces in the event of an emergency, Britain would fight with the British Army of the Rhine alongside her continental allies. Thus the initial round of strategic planning with the Americans had had exactly the opposite impact from that envisaged by Attlee during the war. Rather than having the Americans help to redress the balance in Europe, Britain was assuming commitments on the continent while the Americans were planning to cut their losses. The Chiefs of Staff adopted this compromise in an attempt to get the Americans to join them, but in the short run at any rate they had assumed additional commitments in Europe without gaining additional security. One might ask the question of who was using whom to further their interests? If the goal of Commonwealth defence was maintaining a global security system that furthered British interests on a worldwide basis, this was a step in the wrong direction. The logic of Britain's position, however, offered little other solution. Britain could not remain indifferent to the security of Western Europe forever. The ultimate success of Commonwealth defence would depend on achieving greater security in Europe without being forced to make excessive commitments.

The plan was presented to Attlee at a Staff Conference on 9 June. Attlee's reaction to plan Doublequick was initially hostile. He was concerned that the plan had been given too large a distribution and that leakage of certain parts of it could be very embarrassing to His Majesty's Government. He also thought that the plan required ministerial confirmation. But his most telling criticism was that it

made little sense to make plans that were beyond the country's economic capability. Alexander assured him that distribution of the plan had actually been very limited. As far as the assumptions in the plan that Attlee objected to, particularly the use of atomic weapons, these reflected what was known of the American plan which was parallel in all respects save the British intention of standing on the continent and fighting in the event of an emergency. On this latter point Alexander stated, "There was good reason to believe that the Americans would also come round to this way of thinking". As far as the economic aspect was concerned the plan envisaged fighting with what was available and did not call for additional resources. Attlee also expressed concern that,

. . . while it was apparently the United States military policy to work in the closest co-operation with us, the present United States policy in economic and commercial matters was presenting us with the most serious difficulties. The United States military policy appeared to be the more real of the two. . . . In discussion on this point it was pointed out that the United States military policy of giving every support to the forces of the Commonwealth had probably not been concerted with the United States Administration.<sup>38</sup>

The meeting concluded that the Chiefs of Staff should proceed with the military planning required to implement the plan and that Bevin would consider ways to try to influence the United States so that its economic policy came more into line with its military plans.

Exactly two weeks after this Staff Conference, the Soviet Government cut off all surface communications between West Berlin and the western zones of occupation in Germany. As the Berlin crisis mounted planning for Doublequick was accelerated so that rather than

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38. COS(48)78th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/13.

being able to meet an emergency in the middle of 1949, it could be used to meet an emergency by the end of July 1948. At the Defence Committee meeting held on 27 July:

The Committee - (1) Took note that if the United Kingdom were to embark on major preparations for war it would be necessary to obtain from the United States, not only assistance on the scale now being provided under the European Recovery Programme, but also raw materials for the rearmament programme and compensation for the loss of income from the diversion of production from exports to munitions.<sup>39</sup>

Among other things, the heating up of the cold war made it abundantly clear the extent to which Commonwealth defence was dependent on the aid of the United States. Attlee told the Defence Committee on 30 July, "It had been agreed that in any major conflict the United States must be the predominant partner from the outset and it was essential that any steps taken in the United Kingdom should be consistent with this".<sup>40</sup>

In the period of crisis following the Berlin blockade, the British response towards military co-operation with the Americans again centred on the Combined Chiefs of Staff. Unfortunately political pressures particularly in America made a meeting extremely difficult. On 19 July the Chiefs of Staff received ministerial approval to attend such a meeting.<sup>41</sup> The next problem was to convince the Americans. Bevin opposed making a political approach to the American government. On 4 August the Chiefs of Staff expressed their willingness to go

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39. DO(48)13th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/5.

40. DO(48)14th Mtg, Min 1, Ibid.

41. COS(48)102nd Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/14.

along with an American suggestion to include the French, at least as an interim measure, on the Combined Chiefs of Staff.<sup>42</sup> On 18 August the Vice Chiefs of Staff were informed that the American Chiefs of Staff desired a meeting at the earliest possible date, but were awaiting the approval of the State Department.<sup>43</sup> Then on 1 September the British Chiefs of Staff learned that the Americans could not agree to a meeting, but hoped that the planning and intelligence meetings would continue.<sup>44</sup> The Americans also expressed the hope that a meeting could take place in the not too distant future. Such episodes are indicative of the uphill battle that British strategists faced in framing a policy that required the closest co-operation with their American counterparts.

Not only was planning with the Americans a problem in its own right, but it raised a number of other problems for Commonwealth defence in general. The relationship between British planning with the Americans and their desire to maintain close co-operation with the dominions also created problems. When the Americans first suggested including the Canadians in the planning talks proposed for October 1948 the British Chiefs of Staff opposed the idea.<sup>45</sup> From a British perspective it was difficult to justify the inclusion of one dominion in global planning while excluding the others. On 22 September the Chiefs of Staff reversed course and agreed to Canadian participation

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42. COS(48)108th Mtg, Min 5, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/15.

43. COS(48)115th Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, Ibid.

44. COS(48)121st Mtg, Min 1, Ibid.

45. COS(48)117th Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, 23 August 1948, Ibid.

provided the Americans did the inviting.<sup>46</sup> This decision in turn led the Chiefs of Staff to worry whether or not the other Commonwealth countries would find out about the planning talks with the Americans on their own. It appeared that the secrecy of the April talks had so far been maintained.<sup>47</sup> On 27 September, the Vice Chiefs of Staff decided that the appropriate course would be to have the B.J.S.M. in Washington inform both the Australian and New Zealand military missions in Washington of the talks after obtaining the concurrence of the Americans.<sup>48</sup> This decision set the stage for the take off of Commonwealth defence that was to occur in October 1948. British policy makers were on the brink of establishing themselves as the brokers for free world strategic planning.

The war had greatly increased the power of the non-European world in relation to Europe, and Britain was the only European power to have such direct access to non-European sources of power. Effective co-operation with the old dominions and the United States would secure the primary non-European fonts of power necessary to drive the postwar British world system. As British policy makers nudged the United States and the dominions into the fold, however, they needed to maintain the appearance of control over those sections of the world that still gave them pretensions to world power. Foremost among these areas was the Middle East which had become the geographic centre of postwar Commonwealth defence.

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46. COS(48)134th Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/16.

47. COS(48)135th Mtg, Min 3, 24 September 1948, Ibid.

48. COS(48)138th Mtg, Min 4, Confidential Annex, Ibid.

### The Middle East: Old Frustrations and New Hopes

Ever since January 1947 when Attlee had abandoned his assault on the Chiefs of Staff and Bevin, British strategy had been wedded to maintaining a firm hold on the Middle East. This strategy had been given official sanction with the approval of DO(47)44 in June 1947. Stating that a firm hold on the Middle East was British policy and making it a reality were two separate things, however. Attlee had doubted Britain's ability to maintain a firm hold on the Middle East at an acceptable cost and at times at least his fears must have seemed amply justified.

Following the approval of DO(47)44, Britain continued to face multiple problems in the Middle East. Relations with Egypt continued to oscillate between frustration and renewed hope, but other parts of the Middle East also complicated British strategy. The failure of the Portsmouth Treaty with Iraq was a sharp blow both to Bevin and the Chiefs of Staff in their attempts to find a secure footing for Britain's position in the Middle East. The final withdrawal from Palestine also sent ripples throughout Britain's strategic position in the Middle East. Cyrenaica, Egypt, Transjordan and Anglo-American planning all bobbed as a result of this withdrawal.

The greatest problem remained Egypt. With the Egyptian government intent on taking its case against the 1936 Anglo/Egyptian Treaty to the United Nations, Attlee informed the Chiefs of Staff at a Staff Conference on 21 July 1947 that Middle East headquarters must be removed from Egypt and the British presence there lowered.

The political situation was such that this could no longer be defended. The issue must, therefore, be

considered at once where the headquarters was to be located and to decide on the disposal of the military stores and installations in Egypt. This examination should be put in hand at once.<sup>49</sup>

Two days later the Chiefs of Staff decided to explore the possibility of moving Middle East headquarters to Cyprus.<sup>50</sup> The Principal Administrative Officers, however, replied on 30 July that such a move, even as a temporary measure, was not feasible.<sup>51</sup> The search for an alternate location would continue.

In fact the evidence of Egyptian hostility reflected in the Egyptian government's appeal to the United Nations compounded the problem facing British strategists. A JPS report considered by the Chiefs of Staff on 13 August argued,

In the changed circumstances we believe that the Bevin/Sidky draft is even less likely to meet our requirements to be able to establish ourselves in and operate effectively from Egypt on the outbreak of war than in April 1946. We are convinced, in fact, that only the presence of our forces on Egyptian soil can really guarantee this requirement being met, since events have shown that the value of any written agreement with the Egyptians without the presence of our forces will always be illusory and of little practical value.<sup>52</sup>

In the Chiefs of Staff discussion of this paper, Cunningham concurred with the report as written. He was opposed by Sir William Dickson, the Vice Chief of the Air Staff, who said that the JPS report represented a change in the Chiefs of Staff position on the forces

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49. COS(47)90th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/5.

50. COS(47)92nd Mtg, Min 11, Ibid.

51. COS(47)97th Mtg, Min 7, DEFE 4/6.

52. JP(47)105(Final), 18 July 1947, DEFE 6/3.



required in Egypt and that with the current situation in the United Nations now was not the time to raise such an issue with the Foreign Office. Montgomery backed Dickson's position, but said that this reinforced the need to obtain rights in Cyrenaica and Palestine. Cunningham reluctantly deferred to the judgement of his colleagues.<sup>53</sup>

The situation eased slightly with the United Nations rejection of the Egyptian government's claim on 28 August. Just prior to the Washington talks, the Americans helped to further strengthen the British hand. In a letter on 17 October, Sir William Morgan, Head of the B.J.S.M., informed Montgomery:

I am confident that, if we use the Americans as the go-betweens, we can get an Egyptian Treaty including all the essential military clauses we require. As you know, the Egyptians recently brought great pressure on the War Department and the State Department to help them with military and air missions to replace ours. They got a flat refusal from Ike and Royall (Secretary for War) and I believe, also from the State Department. The Egyptians apparently placed great importance on this matter and were very dejected at their failure to achieve anything.<sup>54</sup>

Montgomery referred this letter on to Bevin.

On 14 November, the Chiefs of Staff learned that Bevin desired to make a fresh start in Egypt without reference to either the 1936 treaty or the Bevin/Sidky agreement.<sup>55</sup> Bevin's new approach would include the removal of all British troops from Egypt, the right of re-entry in an emergency, maximum use of Cyrenaica and a possible lease over a portion of the Sinai. As a result the Chiefs of Staff

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53. COS(47)103rd Mtg, Min 5, DEFE 4/6.

54. FO 800/476, ME/47/17.

55. COS(47)141st Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/8.

considered a paper prepared by the JPS covering the new proposals on 19 November.<sup>56</sup> They unanimously expressed consternation at the political predicament that precluded peacetime use of Egypt for Middle East headquarters when in wartime there would be no substitute for such a base. Nevertheless, they resigned themselves to the JPS report and had it forwarded to the Foreign Office.

The British strategic dilemma in the Middle East increasingly faced the Chiefs of Staff with practical problems such as where to locate British forces and stores to maintain their position. Montgomery raised this issue with his colleagues on 21 October 1947. In discussing the plans for British troops withdrawals from Palestine and Egypt, he said that supplies from Egypt would be shipped to East Africa and he hoped troops would be moving to Libya when its political future had been settled.<sup>57</sup> As a result of Montgomery's exposition the JPS produced a paper on "Redeployment of Middle East Forces" which concluded that Britain could only maintain its position in the Middle East by obtaining long term rights in Cyrenaica, temporary control of Tripolitania, a free hand in the Sudan and maintaining sovereignty over Cyprus.<sup>58</sup> However when this problem was raised in the Defence Committee on 7 November, the government continued to vacillate. Bevin suggested that he would like to see more use made of Aden. The Committee endorsed the position that initial withdrawals from Palestine could go to Cyrenaica provided that substantial numbers were

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56. JP(47)146(Final), DEFE 6/4, considered at COS(47)143rd Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/8.

57. COS(47) Mtg, Min 4, DEFE 4/7.

58. JP(47)137(Final), 4 November 1947, DEFE 6/2.

not involved until the latter stages of withdrawal.<sup>59</sup>

Early in 1948, the Chiefs of Staff felt that, maybe, at long last, events were moving in Britain's favour in the Middle East. They hoped that Britain's dissociation from the United Nations settlement in Palestine would improve Britain's standing with the Arabs.<sup>60</sup> Their optimism was cautious and guarded, though. After the Chiefs' of Staff meeting on 14 January, Hollis wrote Sir Orme Sargent in the Foreign Office:

Events in the Middle East since the end of the war have made our military position in that area most difficult. Egypt and Palestine are the hub areas of any defensive system in the Middle East, and we shall not be physically present in either country in time of peace. Militarily, this single fact places us at a grave disadvantage in preparing the defence plan for the Commonwealth to meet a war waged with modern weapons.<sup>61</sup>

With respect to starting a new initiative towards the Egyptians he added, ". . . but perhaps you will consider . . . whether you think we might not do better after the Iraqi Treaty has had some little time to sink in . . .". It was towards the treaty to be signed with Iraq at Portsmouth the next day that the Chiefs of Staff looked as a means of putting relations with the nations of the Middle East on a surer footing.

The Chiefs of Staff generally saw Iraq as a model of good relations that they hoped to encourage other Arab states to emulate.

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59. DO(47)23rd Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/5.

60. COS(48)3rd Mtg, Min 4, 7 January 1948, DEFE 4/10.

61. COS(48)6th Mtg, Min 1, Annex I, Ibid.

On 18 August 1947 the Vice Chiefs of Staff forwarded to the Foreign Office a JPS report prepared for the visit of the Regent of Iraq that stressed the benefits of Iraq's co-operation in providing Britain with facilities for the defence of the Middle East and emphasizing the need for maintaining good relations.<sup>62</sup> The Chiefs' of Staff main interest in Iraq was the air bases at Habbinyah and Shaiba. On 19 September, they approved a JPS report on the revision of the Anglo/Iraqi treaty that called for sharing these air base facilities. They also offered Iraqis access to British facilities outside of Iraq in exchange for the use of Iraqi facilities.<sup>63</sup> In its final form the new treaty also called for establishing a Joint Defence Board to co-ordinate military planning between the two countries. The new treaty was expected to serve as a model for other states in the Middle East of the benefit of co-operation with Britain. It was signed in Portsmouth on 15 January 1948. The following day the Chiefs of Staff instructed the JPS to prepare a report on implementing the Joint Defence Board. It was all for nought. Civil unrest broke out in Iraq leading the Regent to repudiate the treaty almost before the ink had had a chance to dry. Thus the nationalist agitation that had so bedevilled British relations with Egypt since the end of the war proved highly contagious. Rather than Iraq providing an example of how co-operation with Britain could benefit both parties, it now provided an example of popular agitation embarrassing local politicians who chose to collaborate in British defence schemes.

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62. JP(47)108(Final), DEFE 6/3, considered at COS(47)104th Mtg, Min 4, DEFE 4/6.

63. JP(47)126(Final), DEFE 6/3, considered at COS(47)121st Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/7.

In the eyes of many of Britain's Middle Eastern experts the failure of the Portsmouth Treaty was yet another result of the seemingly interminable problems caused by Britain's unhappy association with Palestine.<sup>64</sup> Political problems in Palestine had given the politicians fits since the end of the war, but the Chiefs of Staff had confidently assumed until relatively late that whatever the political solution Britain would be able to retain strategic requirements there. Palestine's strategic importance was seen in reference to the defence of Egypt. The argument went that Egypt was essential for control of the Middle East and that Palestine was essential for the forward defence of Egypt.<sup>65</sup> At the same meeting on 13 January 1947 when Bevin and the Chiefs of Staff had won Attlee's acceptance of the need for a firm hold on the Middle East, they had also convinced him of the need to secure British strategic requirements in Palestine. Montgomery had stated that this would include stationing a corps of two divisions there. Attlee had said that it appeared that the provisional autonomy plan "would secure our military requirements, providing satisfactory Treaties could be negotiated with the Succession States at the end of the transitional period. He suggested that the Conference should endorse this solution . . .".<sup>66</sup>

On 15 January, Attlee brought the Chiefs of Staff before the Cabinet in what appears to have been an orchestrated attempt on his

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64. Louis, The British Empire in the Middle East, pp. 340-4.

65. As an example see JP(47)1(Final), 5 January 1947, DEFE 6/1.

66. COS(47)9th Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/1.

part to sell the Chiefs' of Staff views. He opened the meeting by asking Montgomery whether it would be possible to impose a solution on one or both of the communities in Palestine if events necessitated such a course of action. Montgomery replied that the troops currently in Palestine would be sufficient to impose a solution on one of the communities, but if both were opposed it would require reinforcements that would probably have to come from the army in Germany. Such a course should only be adopted as an absolute last resort. Attlee then asked the Chiefs of Staff about the importance of Palestine as a factor in Commonwealth defence. To this question Tedder replied by explaining the "three pillars" of Commonwealth defence. He did not elaborate in the Cabinet the reasons for requiring bases in the Middle East other than a vague statement about the requirement to check aggression and that Britain would no longer be able to rely on India as a base for such operations. He then gave the standard "Egypt would be the key position in the Middle East; and it was necessary that we should hold Palestine as a screen for the defence of Egypt".<sup>67</sup> While it would appear that the stage had been set for a new hardline British policy, such was not to be.

Political necessity shortly shoved military requirements into the corner. Within a month the Labour government had come to the conclusion that the situation was beyond its means to solve and decided to turn the problem over to the United Nations. The Chiefs of Staff viewed this prospect with considerable trepidation.

The grave military implications of the risk of the complete loss of our military rights, should the problem be referred to the United Nations Organisation, without

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67. CM(47)6th Mtg, Confidential Annex, CAB 128/4.

any recommendation as to a solution, should be emphasised. Moreover, the desirability, from the military point of view of making the period of Trusteeship indefinite, should be pointed out.<sup>68</sup>

Such were the instructions that the Chiefs of Staff gave Hollis to pass to Alexander after considering a joint Cabinet paper by the Foreign Office and Colonial Office suggesting handing the problem over to the United Nations. The Chiefs of Staff continued to voice their concern, but other voices were louder and on 18 February the Labour government announced that it was referring the issue to the United Nations.

The publication of the report of the United Nations Commission in September 1947 forced the Chiefs of Staff to squarely face the possibility of a total British withdrawal from Palestine. On 8 September when the Chiefs of Staff considered a JPS report on the UN Commission's two proposals for the future of Palestine, their primary concern was that the majority plan might incur the hostility of the Moslem world.<sup>69</sup> On 19 September the Chiefs of Staff instructed the JPS to prepare a brief for themselves and the Minister of Defence on the unconditional withdrawal of British forces from Palestine failing a political solution.<sup>70</sup> The essence of this brief was that withdrawal from Palestine would be strategically damaging to British interests in the Middle East. The only question was how much of the damage could be offset by other arrangements.<sup>71</sup>

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68. COS(47)21st Mtg, 6 February 1947, DEFE 4/1.

69. COS(47)117th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/7.

70. COS(47)121st Mtg, Min 3; Ibid.

71. JP(47)131(Final), DEFE 6/3.

Foremost among these "other arrangements" as already seen in the comments by Montgomery on 21 October 1947 was the securing of British rights in Cyrenaica. British strategic requirements in the Middle East had a very definite pecking order in the postwar era. Egypt held the top position because of its geographic location, its existing facilities and the size <sup>of</sup> its manpower pool for providing essential services for British forces stationed there. Palestine came second in the pecking order. In all three of the above mentioned areas it was not as strategically valuable as Egypt. As noted Palestine was seen primarily as a defensive outwork for the more important position in Egypt and occasionally as an alternate location for some of Britain's Middle Eastern garrison when nationalist agitation in Egypt forced the Chiefs of Staff to look elsewhere. The political situation in Palestine, however, gradually made it even less tenable than Egypt. Thus Cyrenaica began to assume greater importance. The Chiefs of Staff had argued the strategic importance of Cyrenaica since the end of the war, but over time the reasons behind their arguments had changed.

It will be recalled that the row between Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff had originally started in September 1945 as a row over the future of the Italian colonies. Initially strategic thinking had focused primarily on denying the former Italian colonies to others, particularly the Russians.<sup>72</sup> Following the decision to agree to the withdrawal of all British forces from Egypt as a precondition for the treaty negotiations in April 1946, the Chiefs of Staff further defined

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72. JP(45)251(Final), CAB 84/75, considered at COS(45)225th Mtg, Min 1, 15 September 1945, CAB 79/39.



their views. "If there was any doubt whatsoever of obtaining our minimum essential military requirements from Egypt in war, the position of Cyrenaica was such that it assumed an importance parallel to that of Palestine in the future defence of the Middle East".<sup>73</sup> Henceforth the Chiefs of Staff continued to define the strategic importance of Cyrenaica in relation to Egypt. On 17 September 1947 the Chiefs of Staff sent the following JPS appraisal to the Foreign Office:

We conclude that:-

(a) If we obtain full satisfactory facilities in Egypt and Palestine, Cyrenaica is not essential though it has strategic importance for the control of sea communications through the Mediterranean.

(b) The main strategic importance of Cyrenaica varies inversely with the facilities which we obtain in Egypt and Palestine. If we cannot obtain facilities in these two countries the control of Cyrenaica becomes essential.<sup>74</sup>

The timing of this report is significant. It gives a precise view of the Chiefs' of Staff opinion after the Egyptian failure in the UN and before the Washington talks and at the very time that they were in the process of considering the impact of a final British withdrawal from Palestine.

While the problem in Egypt was finding an accommodation with Egyptian nationalism, and that in Palestine was trying to find a solution amenable to both the Jews and the Palestinians, the problem in Cyrenaica was finding a suitable means for legitimizing a long term British presence there. British troops were there after the war by

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73. COS(46)82nd Mtg, Min 1, 24 May 1946, CAB 79/48.

74. JP(47)120, DEFE 6/3, considered at COS(47)120th Mtg, Min 8, DEFE 4/7.

right of conquest, but the problem of determining the future of Italy's former colonies had rested first with the Council of Foreign Ministers. When they had been unable to arrive at a solution, the problem had been passed to the United Nations. The priorities of the Chiefs of Staff had been first to block any power that might be hostile to British interests from obtaining trusteeship rights there and secondly to obtain those rights for Britain if possible.

On 24 November 1947 the Vice Chiefs of Staff considered a report by the JPS on what form of trusteeship they should recommend for Cyrenaica. The report advocated a strategic trusteeship under the UN Security Council, but said that ordinary trusteeship would be acceptable provided that the wording of the trusteeship agreement was similar to that for Tanganyika. It also stated that the period of trusteeship should be for no less than ten years. The VCIGS took exception to this last requirement saying that Britain would need to station troops in Cyrenaica as long as the international situation required the presence of British troops in the Middle East. In this amended form the report was sent to the Foreign Office.<sup>75</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff returned to this theme early in 1948. In a letter to the Foreign Office on 14 January, they reiterated:

The Chiefs of Staff wish again to express their concern at the possibility that a trusteeship for Libya might be terminated at the end of ten years. The Chiefs of Staff have already expressed their view and drawn your attention to the desirability of not specifying a time limit of any kind to the trusteeship agreement. They also stated that if a time limit was necessary it must be not less than 25 years.<sup>76</sup>

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75. JP(47)147(Final), DEFE 6/4, considered at COS(47)146th Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/9.

76. COS(48)7th Mtg, Min 1, Annex I, DEFE 4/10.

Once again the Chiefs of Staff viewed the problem of Cyrenaica with reference to Egypt. The 1936 treaty would end with Egypt in 1956 if no new agreement was negotiated in the interim. Therefore a trusteeship agreement that ended in Cyrenaica a year or two later would compound the problem. Thus the Chiefs of Staff insisted, "that every effort should be made in the forthcoming negotiations for the trusteeship of Libya to make certain that the trusteeship will not come to an abrupt conclusion at the very time when our control of Cyrenaica is likely to be more essential than ever".<sup>77</sup> So concerned were the Chiefs of Staff for gaining their strategic requirements in Cyrenaica that they were willing as a last resort to consider returning Eritrea and Italian Somaliland to the Italians if that were a prerequisite for obtaining trusteeship of Libya.

As the withdrawal from Palestine headed for its denouement and the situation in Cyrenaica remained unresolved, in February 1948 the Chiefs of Staff further hardened their attitude. On 11 February Montgomery told the Chiefs of Staff that Egypt was vital to the defence of the Middle East. He went on to say:

It would only be by using troops stationed in Libya in peacetime that we should be able to secure a base in Egypt immediately on the outbreak of war and thus be enabled to take the necessary measures for its defence. If the rights that we required in Libya were not obtained, thus preventing us from entering Egypt on the outbreak of a war, then our ability to maintain a firm hold in the Middle East would be destroyed.<sup>78</sup>

He was strongly supported by the First Sea Lord who added, "we could

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77. Ibid.

78. COS(48)21st Mtg, Min 6, Ibid.

not defend the Middle East in wartime unless the industrial potential and the port facilities in Egypt were available to us". In a further discussion of this issue on 3 March, the Chiefs of Staff were even more specific:

It would be important to stress the point that without Egypt the Middle East could not be defended, and that if we did not obtain the right to enter Egypt in war by negotiation we should have to go there by force. It should also be pointed out that if we could not negotiate the right to enter Egypt in war, the strategic facilities we required in other countries of the Middle East, and in particular Cyrenaica, would be even more essential, for we should need them to enable us to enter Egypt by force .<sup>79</sup>

In late March the situations in both Italy and the other former Italian colonies forced the Chiefs' of Staff to shift their advice on Cyrenaica. On 31 March, the Chiefs of Staff switched their advice from seeking trusteeship to stalling.<sup>80</sup> On 21 April they were unanimous in opposing the return of Eritrea and Italian Somaliland to Italy even as a bargaining counter to achieve British strategic requirements in Cyrenaica. The reasons for this shift were the twin conclusions that the local inhabitants would oppose a return of Italian rule which both Italy and Britain lacked the forces to impose and the fear of communist influence spreading from Italy into the region.<sup>81</sup> On 30 April, they received Defence Committee endorsement of their new position. "THE PRIME MINISTER said that the whole problem of the future of the Italian Colonies should be looked at afresh in the light

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79. COS(48)31st Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/11.

80. COS(48)46th Mtg, Min 11, Annex II.

81. JP(48)44(Final), withheld in both DEFE 6/5 and DEFE 4/12, considered at COS(48)55th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/12.

of discussion".<sup>82</sup> The Committee also agreed that it was clear that the United Kingdom must have a free rein in Cyrenaica.

The final withdrawal from Palestine threw British strategy in the Middle East into turmoil. On 25 May, the Chiefs of Staff devoted their entire meeting to a discussion of Palestine. In preparing a brief on "Future Situation in Palestine and Effects on the Middle East" they concurred with a Foreign Office draft on this subject, but also considered that certain additional points needed emphasis. They were concerned about the lasting impact of current hostilities between the Jews and the Arabs. As for the strategic importance of the Middle East, they listed in order: source of oil, strategic air base and defence of Africa. They pointed out that the economic recovery of the West depended upon access to Middle Eastern oil and that in a war the 'Anglo-American "United Nations"' would not be able to fight for longer than two years without Middle Eastern oil unless they restricted their operations strictly to the defence of the Western Hemisphere. They quoted from the record of the Washington talks American agreement on the importance of maintaining Arab goodwill. They also expressed fear of the spread of communism in the region, particularly in Israel. They concluded:

If we antagonise the Mohammedan World and lose their respect there is no chance, in the near future, of our maintaining a firm hold of the Middle East in peace or in war. In peace we may lose our oil concessions and our Turkish Ally will be isolated. In war we have no hope of fighting successfully for Egypt or of retaining our control of the Mediterranean; we have no hope of retaining our vital oil resources and we shall have no air base for our strategic air offensive from the South.<sup>83</sup>

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82. DO(48)9th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/5.

83. COS(48)71st Mtg, Annex III, DEFE 4/13.

The withdrawal from Palestine also induced Montgomery on 1 June to request that the JPS produce a paper for the Defence Committee again emphasizing the importance of Egypt in the light of British withdrawal from the mandate. This suggestion was endorsed by his colleagues.<sup>84</sup> The report was completed on 1 July, and considered by the Chiefs of Staff on 7 July.<sup>85</sup> The report again concluded that the maintenance of a British main base in Egypt was essential for British security interests in the Middle East. It recommended that the Commanders-in-Chief Middle East reduce forces in Egypt to treaty levels as quickly as possible and expressed the hope that the Foreign Office would yet succeed in securing British interests through negotiations. In discussing this report Cunningham again stressed the American connection:

He was concerned, however, that if the Defence Committee did not endorse the view of the Chiefs of Staff that the defence of the Middle East depended on our remaining in Egypt, it might be difficult to persuade the Americans that we still considered the defence of the Middle East to be one of the pillars of our strategy . . .

The Chiefs of Staff approved the report for circulation to the Defence Committee, but stipulated that it should be withheld from the Americans.

The Defence Committee never considered the report, apparently because of Foreign Office opposition. On 6 August the Vice Chiefs of Staff were informed that the Foreign Office opposed the recommendation in this report that British troop strength in Egypt should be run down

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84. COS(48)75th Mtg, Min 4, Ibid.

85. JP(48)72(Final) considered at COS(48)94th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/14.

as quickly as possible to treaty levels. At the meeting it was unclear what the Foreign Office's reasons were so the Vice Chiefs decided to stand pat on their previous endorsement of the report.<sup>86</sup> By 25 August, Montgomery submitted a paper to the Chiefs of Staff recommending postponing any further rundown of British forces in Egypt on the grounds that if any emergency occurred in the near future those forces and the facilities that they manned would be required immediately. He received the support of the other chiefs to put this paper forward to the Minister of Defence to request ministerial endorsement.<sup>87</sup>

This request led to a Staff Conference with Alexander on 9 September. At this meeting Montgomery opened by pointing out that a conflict existed between plan Sandown, the Middle East portion of Doublequick, and the directive to reduce British troops as quickly as possible to 1936 treaty levels. He was backed by his two colleagues who offered other points. Tedder pointed out that there were still large stocks of supplies in Egypt that would cost a great deal to replace. The Chiefs of Staff had consistently said that these could be moved within twenty-one months of a decision being made on where to send them. This had still not been done. Only a small quantity could go to East Africa and only after the facilities had been completed for them. Alexander, however, countered that the Chancellor of the Exchequer had demanded the withdrawal of all British forces in Egypt saying that there were no more dollars available to keep them there. On that unpromising note he agreed to raise the issue again with

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86. COS(48)110th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/15.

87. COS(48)118th Mtg, Min 6, Ibid.

Cripps and Bevin.<sup>88</sup> When the issue was considered in the Defence Committee on 13 September, Bevin supported the Chiefs of Staff, but qualified this support by explaining the extreme sensitivity of the issue.<sup>89</sup> The committee in turn recommended that Bevin arrange a meeting between himself, His Majesty's Ambassador to Egypt and the Chiefs of Staff. At this meeting on 17 September, Bevin came down strongly on the side of the Chiefs of Staff. He proposed to maintain a low profile on this issue and would only discuss it if the Egyptians raised it. If they did raise it, he would try to downplay it.<sup>90</sup>

The Arab/Israeli conflict that followed the creation of the state of Israel created specific problems for British strategy in the Middle East in the summer of 1948. The two primary concerns of the Chiefs of Staff in this regard were their treaty obligations with the Arab states and the impact of this struggle on their relations with the United States. The first concern was that Israel would invade Transjordan. The Chiefs of Staff stood firmly behind upholding Britain's obligations under its 1946 treaty with Transjordan. Britain should go to Transjordan's aid if its territory was attacked by Israel. They said that such assistance would be provided primarily through air power and supply with British ground forces being used only as a last resort.<sup>91</sup>

The same theme was followed on 11 August when Montgomery

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88. COS(48)125th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/16.

89. DO(48)18th Mtg, Min 6, CAB 131/5.

90. COS(48)130th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/16.

91. JP(48)76(Final) considered at COS(48)82nd Mtg, Min 8, 16 June 1948, DEFE 4/13.



expressed concern about the possible British loss of prestige in the Middle East. He suggested that the United Kingdom should make a firm statement that if Israel attacked Transjordan, in accordance with Britain's treaty with Transjordan, Britain would be at war with Israel. He also wanted to fly supplies to Transjordan that were currently being held up by the United Nation's arms embargo. In discussion the other Chiefs of Staff agreed that the situation was even more serious than stated by the CIGS. They concluded that, "The remedy would lie in offering to guarantee the present Boundaries of all Arab States against Jewish aggression".<sup>92</sup> This attitude brought the Chiefs of Staff into disagreement, however, with their American allies.

On 13 August the Vice Chiefs of Staff were informed that the RAF was ready to move ammunition stores into Transjordan. They agreed to take no action, though, until they had obtained the views of the United States Department of State.<sup>93</sup> On 27 August the Chiefs of Staff were informed that the State Department opposed the movement of stores into Transjordan and that the Foreign Office supported the American view. The Chiefs of Staff decided not to contest the Foreign Office's decision.<sup>94</sup> The need to maintain American co-operation, thus added a new constraint to British strategy in the Middle East and hence to Commonwealth defence as a whole.

In the year between the Washington talks of 1947 and the

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92. COS(48)112th Mtg, Min 6, DEFE 4/15.

93. COS(48)113th Mtg, Min 3, Ibid.

94. COS(48)120th Mtg, Min 8, Ibid.

Commonwealth Prime Minister's Meeting in October 1948, the Middle East had continued the same pattern of new hopes continually meeting with old frustrations that had dogged British policy in the region since the end of the war. Hopes for the successful construction of a firm foundation for their defence policy in that region continually rose only to be dashed. Each time one set of hopes was dashed it had a follow-on effect that meant that some other aspect of British policy in the region was also thrown out of kilter. The success of the Washington talks had encouraged British planners by offering American support for their policy in the region. However, that support would only be useful if Britain had a firm structure around which to tie that support. British policy makers had hoped that a new defence agreement with Iraq would be the start of a new era for British relations with the region. The renunciation of that treaty had been a major set back. The final withdrawal from Palestine served to emphasize the importance of Cyrenaica. The lack of facilities and manpower in Cyrenaica served to reinforce the importance of Egypt. Hopes for better relations with the Egyptians seemed to spring up with regularity, but never produced tangible results. Britain's tenuous hold on Cyrenaica also served to accentuate the importance of Egypt. Into an already strained situation the first Arab/Israeli war added even greater difficulties. Britain might hope to win greater support from the Arabs by supporting them against Israel, but the Arab states seemed reluctant to call on Britain and there were limits to the amount of support that Britain could give without risking the all important co-operation of the United States. Thus British policy in the Middle East was like a mixture of sand and water that was continually agitated. British policy makers developed many ideas to still the water long enough for the sand to settle, but always some

unattended force continued to agitate the water. A firm hold on the Middle East might be their policy, but it was not their reality.

#### The Empire: Worldwide Burdens

If the Middle East gave the Chiefs of Staff a migraine, the colonial empire gave them a dull throb pierced by an occasional sharp pain. They continued to work to incorporate the colonies into the overall scheme of Commonwealth defence. Differences with the Colonial Office continued to cloud progress in this area and was accentuated by the first major examples of postwar colonial unrest.

The differences of approach between the Chiefs of Staff and the Colonial Office towards Commonwealth defence or for that matter the meaning of the British Empire itself is nowhere more evident than in the results of Montgomery's trip to Africa from 13 November to 18 December 1947. The report that Montgomery submitted following the trip exceeded seventy pages.<sup>95</sup> The report is vintage Montgomery. It is studded with hyperbole and asserted conclusions. He described African resources and manpower as unlimited. He asserted that if Ethiopians were given the vote ninety percent would vote in favour of being returned to Italian rule rather than continue to live under the corrupt and despotic regime of Haile Selassie. He concluded his introduction with a scathing attack on the Colonial Office and the Colonial Service for failing to adequately address the problem of African development:

(a) We have no time to lose.

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95. Memorandum: Tour of Africa in Nov/Dec 1947 by Field Marshal the Viscount Montgomery of Alamein, Chief of the Imperial General Staff, 19 December 47, WO 216/675 or DO 35/2380.

(b) The first and immediate requirement is a Grand Design for British Africa as a whole; this can only be drawn up in London.

Next must come a Master Plan, or blue print, for each Federation (or Group of Colonies).

(c) Immense "drive" will be required to formulate the Grand Design, and in fact to get a move on at all. Many people will say it can't be done; such people should be eliminated ruthlessly.

Belly-aching will assume colossal proportions; it must be stamped on.

(d) "Go-getters" will be required in large numbers. We will do no good so long as we keep Government servants for 20 to 25 years in the same place in a hot climate, and then make them Governors of Colonies in the same part of the world. A man is burnt-out by the time he becomes a Governor; he requires a good "re-bushing" after say 10 years and should be sent somewhere else and to a better climate.

(e) British and other European settlers in African colonies live their lives under very easy conditions and dislike anything which upsets the even tempo of their existence: such as schemes for progress and development. Many of them require a good jolt which will make them face-up to their Empire responsibilities in these respects.<sup>96</sup>

Montgomery's brazen style should not obscure the importance of this report, though. At its heart it raises a very fundamental question of the importance of the colonial empire to Britain. Montgomery's views would have been very congenial to Joseph Chamberlain. At the heart of all of Montgomery's rhetoric is the idea that the colonial empire is a vast underdeveloped estate that urgently needs to be developed for both the benefit of the local inhabitants and Great Britain. These twin ends are seen as being mutually compatible. Finally, these ends would only be achieved by dint of tremendous effort.

Montgomery initially sent copies of the report only to Attlee and

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96. Ibid. Paragraph 13.

Bevin, asking Attlee what further distribution he would like. Attlee instructed Montgomery to send it to Creech Jones, Cripps, Alexander and Noel Baker.<sup>97</sup> Attlee thought the report significant enough to convene a special meeting of ministers, GEN 210, to discuss it. The report set off a bomb in the Colonial Office. Nor was it all that Montgomery had to say on the subject. On 7 January 1948 he wrote a personal letter to Attlee asking for permission to see him about the report. In his letter, Montgomery informed Attlee that there were important matters which he could not state in the report but that were vital to it.<sup>98</sup> Attlee convened GEN 210 on 9 January. Attlee was in the chair and the meeting was attended by Morrison, Cripps, Addison, Bevin, Alexander and Creech Jones. Creech Jones offered an apologia on the part of the Colonial Office, but his comments were largely brushed aside. The other ministers generally supported Montgomery's contention that adequate co-ordination had not previously taken place between the economic needs of the United Kingdom and her colonies:

Ministers recognised that in recent years much progress had been made in the economic development of the Colonies. They felt, however, that the world economic situation made it necessary to review both our policy and the adequacy and suitability of the machinery for giving effect to it. It could not be assumed that Marshall Aid, over the period contemplated, would be sufficient to restore the economic independence either of this country or of the other participating European countries. For that we must look to the economic development of the Colonial territories in Africa and elsewhere controlled by the Western European powers. . . .

Ministers considered that the planning of Colonial economic development which had hitherto taken place was

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97. Draft letter from Attlee to Montgomery, 21 December 1947, PREM 8/923. Arthur Creech Jones was the Colonial Secretary and Philip Noel Baker was the Commonwealth Secretary.

98. Letter from Montgomery to Attlee, 7 January [1948], Attlee Papers, Bodlean Library, Oxford, Box 49.

defective in that insufficient attention had been given to the integration of our policy in this direction with economic policy in this country. No attempt had been made to determine on broad lines what proportion of the resources of the United Kingdom ought to be devoted to Colonial development or to assess the relative values of the objects to which these resources might be applied, either between the United Kingdom and the Colonies or between individual colonies. . . .<sup>99</sup>

This entire episode is significant for the light that it sheds on the inner workings and positions of various individuals and institutions in the postwar Labour government. Montgomery's vitriolic report appears to have been a flash in the pan as far as he was concerned. In the remaining eleven months that he was to serve as CIGS, he does not seem to have raised the issue again and he never raised it with his fellow Chiefs of Staff. As we have seen and will continue to see, the Chiefs' of Staff concerns with respect to the dependent empire primarily focused on raising colonial forces, establishing the machinery for integrating colonial defence efforts with the larger sweep of Commonwealth defence and meeting colonial emergencies. They also frequently commented on the defence aspects of the political evolution of the colonies. It would be surprising if it were otherwise for economic development can hardly be considered the metier of a nation's military advisers. That Montgomery was sensitive to the issues involved, however, shows that Britain's postwar military advisers were not straight jacketed into a narrow view of their professional competency. One must look beyond the Chiefs of Staff for the true significance of the report.

The response of Attlee to the report is illuminating. The report struck a responsive chord in Attlee. In describing Attlee's reception

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99. GEN 210, 1st Mtg, CAB 130/31.

of the report, Montgomery records, "The Prime Minister very quickly replied that he wanted me to send copies to the Colonial Secretary (Mr. Arthur Creech Jones) and certain other Cabinet Ministers".<sup>100</sup> Attlee's convening of an ad hoc conference of ministers is also significant. These meetings were used by Attlee to settle major political questions in the same way that Staff Conferences were used to settle major defence questions. Decisions on continuing Britain's atomic research and to produce an atomic bomb were taken at meetings of GEN 75 and 163 respectively. Decisions on Attlee's minute on the need for a more open Commonwealth relationship discussed earlier<sup>101</sup> were taken in the meetings of GEN 186. While the actual results of GEN 210 had no direct impact on the development of Commonwealth defence, we shall see shortly that another ad hoc Committee, GEN 264, did lead to more effective co-operation between the military and the Colonial Office.

For his part, Creech Jones's response to Montgomery's report was completely defensive. He denied Montgomery's charges of inadequate planning. One suspects that in this response he was acting as the mouthpiece for his officials who in the normal order of bureaucratic politics would naturally resist any external criticism. That the Colonial Office responded on Montgomery's own level only lends weight to his criticism. Rather than attack Montgomery, they could have usefully used his report to support a case for the allocation of greater resources, even at the expense of current defence needs. This line had been taken with considerable success by Attlee, Dalton,

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100. Montgomery, Memoirs, p 463.

101. See p. 97 above.

Cripps and even Alexander in their arguments with the Chiefs of Staff over the need to reduce military spending to build economic recovery at home. But the Colonial Office did not rise to the occasion. This episode sheds considerable light on Attlee's attitude towards Creech Jones as "one of my mistakes".<sup>102</sup> Or as Attlee recorded in 1950, "Creech Jones despite much hard work and devotion had not appeared to have a real grip of administration in the Colonial Office".<sup>103</sup> Montgomery was even more brutal, "I was once asked which was the worst [Ministry in Whitehall], and replied without any hesitation: The Colonial Office".<sup>104</sup>

The Chiefs' of Staff endeavors with respect to the colonial empire must be seen against this background. Little headway was made on the issue of raising colonial forces to support Commonwealth defence. Between September 1947 and October 1948, the Chiefs of Staff continued to work on the institutional context of integrating the colonies into Commonwealth defence machinery, but their primary attention was focused upon colonial unrest. Always in the background was their inability to work effectively with the Colonial Office.

On 3 February 1948 the Vice Chiefs of Staff considered a JPS report on "Relationship between Colonial Governors and Zonal Commanders-in-Chief".<sup>105</sup> This report was a summary to date of the

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102. Harris, Attlee. p. 446.

103. Wm. Roger Louis, "The End of the Palestine Mandate: The British Perspective", Paper presented at the American Historical Association Annual Meeting, 29 December 1983 from Attlee's notes, ATLE 1/17, Churchill College, Cambridge.

104. Montgomery, Memoirs. p. 430.

105. JP(47)161(Final) considered at COS(48)17th Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/10.



Chiefs' of Staff attempt with the help of the Foreign Office, Commonwealth Relations Office and the Colonial Office to rationalize regional defence organizations within the empire. This global organization started with the Chiefs of Staff in London. Under the Chiefs of Staff were the regional Commanders-in-Chief for the Middle East and the Far East. These commanders presided over the British Defence Co-ordination Committees Middle East and Far East respectively. Middle East headquarters was eventually located at Fayid in Egypt and Far East headquarters was located at Singapore. The boundaries of these two overseas commands were still being sorted out. The line dividing the two regional commands ran tentatively through the centre of the Indian Ocean meaning that all of Africa and the Middle East was under the operational command of the Commanders-in-Chiefs, Middle East. In part this report by the JPS dealt with the issue of which zone Ceylon should be included in and the possibility of eventually including India and Pakistan in one of the zones. Under these regional or "zonal" commanders were ranged the various local defence committees that the Chiefs of Staff had previously been working on establishing. The purpose of this report was to outline the relationship that was supposed to exist between the regional commanders and local colonial officials. The Chiefs of Staff approved the report and had it forwarded to all of the concerned agencies.

The Chiefs of Staff continued refining the organization of local defence committees within the dependent empire to more effectively integrate the colonies into Commonwealth defence. On 9 February, the Vice Chiefs of Staff considered another JPS report that examined the

need for defence committees in Jamaica and Kenya.<sup>106</sup> The report concluded:

(a) We favour the establishment of a regional defence committee covering the East and Central African Colonies. This Committee should be called "The East African Colonial Defence Committee".

(b) The need for a Local Defence Committee in Kenya remains. No such committee is at present required in the other Colonies.

(c) No Local Defence Committee is required in Jamaica.

The Vice Chiefs approved the report to be forwarded to the Colonial Office as an interim expression of their views.

On 17 March the Chiefs of Staff approved a JPS report on "Combined Headquarters in West Africa".<sup>107</sup> This report explained the strategic importance of West Africa in terms of the protection of sea communications in the Atlantic Ocean, the support of naval forces operating in the Mediterranean and the trans-African air, and possibly land, reinforcement route. It argued against an attempt to collocate service headquarters in the region as this would lead to inefficiency. Naval and air headquarters should remain at Freetown and Army headquarters should be in either the Gold Coast or Nigeria close to the civil authorities.

It should be noted that this last report was considered by the Chiefs of Staff in the aftermath of the Accra riots. On 1 March the Vice Chiefs of Staff had addressed the issue of what troops they could

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106. JP(48)5(Final) considered at COS(48)20th Mtg, Min 2, Ibid.

107. JP(47)156(Final) considered at COS(48)39th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/11.

provide if local forces proved incapable of stabilizing the situation in the Gold Coast. Two days later when the Chiefs of Staff considered this issue they emphasized they did not want to commit their limited reserves unless the situation absolutely required it. General Hollis also noted that there was a problem with current procedures as "civil departments", one assumes the Colonial Office, were approaching the services directly rather than co-ordinating with the Ministry of Defence. He informed the Chiefs of Staff that he would attempt to straighten the situation out.<sup>108</sup>

Nor was the Gold Coast the only emergency that the Chiefs of Staff confronted in the colonial empire at this time. On 27 February, they were informed that three battalions of infantry would be embarked from Jamaica that night and would be in British Honduras within forty-eight hours to deal with unrest. When the Chiefs of Staff reviewed the situation on 10 March a request for reinforcements had also been issued from the Leeward Islands.

LT. GENERAL TEMPLER said that demands for possible reinforcement of various colonial territories were being received piecemeal and unless these demands were co-ordinated considerable difficulty might arise in meeting them with the limited resources available. He recalled that in January 1947 the War Office had recommended that two full-time militia battalions were required in the Caribbean area. The Colonial Office, however, had decided for financial reasons, that, it would only be possible to maintain one battalion. He thought that in view of the present situation, the forces needed for internal security purposes in the West Indies should be reviewed.<sup>109</sup>

A letter to the above effect was despatched to the Colonial Office.

Gradually both of these situations returned to normality. On 24

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108. COS(48)30th Mtg, Min 1 and 31st Mtg, Min 5, Ibid.

109. COS(48)36th Mtg, Min 4, Ibid.

March the Chiefs of Staff were still worried about the situation in the Gold Coast, but the next day they agreed that the York aircraft that had been on standby in the United Kingdom could go to a decreased level of readiness.<sup>110</sup> On 2 April they agreed that two frigates would remain on station off West Africa until the release of the Convention leaders. Likewise, they noted on 16 April that the situation in the Caribbean had settled down.<sup>111</sup>

On 26 April, they considered a report by the JPS on "Caribbean Area - Military Situation". The report said that the British colonies in the area were strategically important only for sea communications with Central America and Panama. "We consider, therefore, that we need not rate the West Indies highly among our imperial defence commitments".<sup>112</sup> In any event, the United States could be relied upon to prevent any outside force from threatening the area. At this meeting, Templer again expressed concern over the short notice calls for reinforcements from the area and blamed this on the poor intelligence in the colonial territories. The report was referred to the Defence Committee, but was never considered.

The Chiefs of Staff faced two further outbreaks of colonial unrest in June 1948. One of these was extremely short lived and the other very long lived. On 21 June the Chiefs of Staff laid disorders in British Guiana to rest a week after they had first considered them.<sup>113</sup> The major source of colonial trouble, however, was the start

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110. COS(48)44th Mtg, Min 1 and 45th Mtg, Min 2, Ibid.

111. COS(48)47th Mtg, Min 7 and 53rd Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/12.

112. JP(48)42(Final) considered at COS(48)57th Mtg, Min 3, Ibid.

113. COS(48)84rd Mtg, Min 4, DEFE 4/14.

of the Malayan emergency on 16 June. The Chiefs of Staff considered a telegram from the Commanders-in-Chief, Far East outlining the requirements for restoring order at their meeting on 28 June.<sup>114</sup> This, however, was the third meeting of the Chiefs of Staff that day and it would appear that the crisis in Berlin dominated their attention. They were informed on 14 July that the Cabinet hoped that the situation in Malaya would be dealt with firmly and that it would not be allowed to drag out.<sup>115</sup> On 11 August, the Chiefs of Staff expressed concern about sending reinforcements to the Far East considering other world tensions at the time. They decided to refer the issue to the Defence Committee.<sup>116</sup> Two days later, the Defence Committee decided that an additional brigade should be despatched to Malaya and that Australian assistance should also be sought.<sup>117</sup>

Against this background at a Staff Conference with Alexander on 10 September, the Chiefs of Staff once again attempted to improve their relations with the Colonial Office and hence the administration of the colonies. They expressed the view that many of the problems in the colonies particularly in the Far East were the result of colonial misadministration. The conference agreed that the Minister of Defence should raise this issue privately with the Colonial Secretary.<sup>118</sup> This approach bore fruit when the Vice Chiefs of Staff were informed on 27

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114. COS(48)89th Mtg, Min 5, Ibid.

115. COS(48)99th Mtg, Min 5, Ibid.

116. COS(48)112th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/15.

117. DO(48)16th Mtg, Min 3, CAB 131/5.

118. COS(48)127th Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/16.

September:

that on the recommendation of the Foreign Secretary, the Prime Minister had agreed that a representative of the Colonial Office should be appointed to become a member of the Joint Intelligence Committee. By this means it was hoped to improve the co-ordination of Colonial with other intelligence.<sup>119</sup>

It was also suggested that it would be advantageous if the Colonial Office official selected for this post could be a graduate of the Imperial Defence College. Thus after another year marked largely by frustration, the Chiefs of Staff seemed to be making some headway in their attempt to bring the Colonial Office and the dependent empire under their influence. For the Chiefs of Staff the dull throb and the sharp pains were still there, but there was cause to hope that they might be alleviated in the future.

#### South Asia: The Unsolved Problem

Lack of progress also characterized the Chiefs' of Staff plans for integrating India and Pakistan into Commonwealth defence between September 1947 and October 1948. Co-operation with Ceylon, however, provided some consolation and in September 1948 there was again hope of progress with Pakistan. Co-operation with Pakistan might lead to co-operation with India.

It will be recalled that at the time of Indian independence, the Chiefs of Staff were awaiting the call to send a team to negotiate a defence agreement with the new dominions. Hopes had been pinned on the functioning of the Joint Defence Council (JDC) under Mountbatten's chairmanship as a vehicle for co-ordinating defence interests between

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119. COS(48)138th Mtg, Min 5, Ibid.

the two new dominions and with the United Kingdom.

The first meeting of the Joint Defence Council had taken place on 6 August. Ismay had made a very bland statement describing his talks with the Chiefs of Staff in London in July. He did not go into the detailed requirements that the Chiefs of Staff had laid out in their paper "India - Defence Requirements". He confined himself to discussing the weakness of the new dominions because of the departure of British forces and the division of the Indian Army. He explained very carefully that talks between the new dominions and representatives of the British Chiefs of Staff would not be binding on any of the parties, but would be in the nature of consultations.<sup>120</sup>

Mountbatten's reports on the prospects for joint discussions on defence seem to have been strongly coloured by his own desire for their success. Before the first meeting of the JDC, he had reported:

I had a separate meeting with Nehru on 29th July and referred to the desire of the British Government to discuss overall Commonwealth defence arrangements with both India and Pakistan as soon as the two Governments were set up. . . . Nehru welcomed this wholeheartedly as he thought it was a most necessary move, particularly as it would facilitate discussion of certain questions of mutual assistance between Pakistan and India. I have also mentioned this to Jinnah who was equally pleased.<sup>121</sup>

In his report after the meeting of the JDC he reported,

The Joint Defence Council decided that the Mission sent out by the Chiefs of Staff should negotiate with it in the first instance in Delhi. As I shall continue to be

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120. Meeting of the Provisional Joint Defence Council, T.O.P., Vol XII, No. 352, pp. 545-7.

121. Vicesoy's Personal Report No. 15, 1 August 1947, T.O.P., Vol XII, No. 302, pp. 450-1.

Chairman of the Joint Defence Council after 15th August, I shall hope to be able to regulate these discussions and trust that the desired objects will be achieved.<sup>122</sup>

Ismay's comments in a letter of 11 August to Sir Terrance Shone, however, paint a rather different picture. "I ought to add that I do not see any possibility of any connection whatsoever between the Joint Defence Council and the Chiefs of Staff at home".<sup>123</sup> Mountbatten himself backed away from his earlier optimism in a letter to Listowel on 16 August. Again discussing the JDC meeting of 6 August he said,

Even as it was, the Indian Leaders did not look too happy about the future prospects, and would not commit themselves further than to say that they would examine Ismay's statement carefully and then let us have their reactions.

I am all in favour of the Chiefs of Staff's Mission coming as soon as possible, but I do not want them to come before the two new Governments have got over their teething troubles, have got their Defence Departments more or less organised, and have begun to know and trust their British Commanders-in-Chief. As a rough guess, I should say that a suitable target for the delegation to arrive would be about the middle of October: but I will, of course, send a firm recommendation in due course.<sup>124</sup>

The violence that followed partition shunted any plans for immediate defence negotiations with the new dominions, at least for the moment, into a siding. The governments of the India and Pakistan more than had their hands full with more pressing problems. Nevertheless, the Chiefs of Staff continued with their preparations to send a delegation. On 10 September they considered a JPS report

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122. Viceroy's Personal Report No. 16, 8 August 1947, T.O.P., Vol XII, No. 385, pp. 599.

123. Footnote 4, T.O.P., Vol XII, No. 352, p. 547.

124. Letter Mountbatten to Listowel, T.O.P., Vol XII, No. 488, pp. 742-3.



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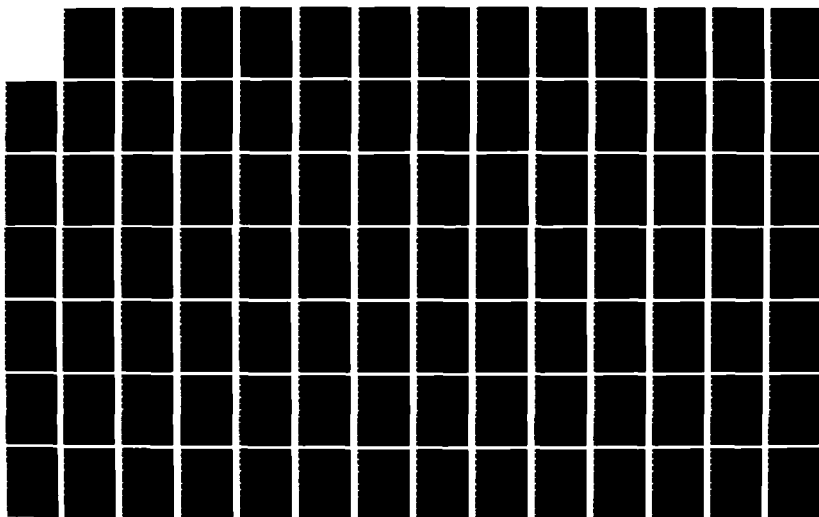
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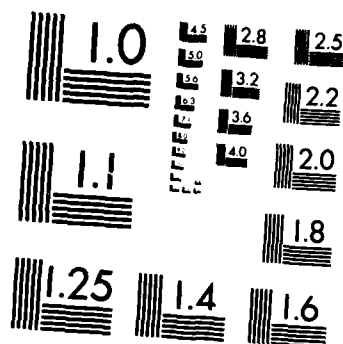
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intended to serve as a brief for defence negotiations with India and Pakistan.<sup>125</sup> The report listed Britain's basic requirements as: the maintenance and efficiency of the dominions' armed forces, the maintenance of bases, the retention of stores, air transit rights and the gurkhas. It also again raised the problem of security restrictions. In discussing the report, the Chiefs of Staff stressed the goal of British defence negotiators should be first and foremost to convince India and Pakistan to work together on defence issues. They also confronted their old dilemma concerning security and the new dominions. Collaboration on defence science was to be deferred. Similarly,

While we were anxious to establish United Kingdom liaison officers in India and Pakistan to pursue discussions on defence policy, we should be very reluctant to accept Indian and Pakistan liaison officers in London. Their establishment in London would give rise to difficulties with the other Dominion liaison officers who had access to documents which we would be reluctant to disclose to India and Pakistan, at any rate for the present.

The issue of Indian and Pakistani officers attending British service schools was also to be avoided. In discussing when the talks might take place, General Scoones, now of the Commonwealth Relations Office, doubted that Mountbatten's hope that talks take place in the middle of October would be realized. The Chiefs of Staff continued to press for talks at the earliest possible date. "The Committee recognised that the situation in India might well impose some postponement, but took the view that any such postponement was most undesirable". At a sequel to this meeting, the Chiefs of Staff were informed on 17

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125. JP(47)115(Final) considered at COS(47)118th Mtg, Min 4, DEFE 4/7.

September that "it was not expected to be possible to negotiate long term defence arrangements with India and Pakistan before November, 1947 at the earliest, and possibly not until a good deal later".<sup>126</sup>

On 8 October Ismay was back in London and again attended a Chiefs' of Staff meeting. His personal view of the situation in India and the course of events that led up to it have been vetted from the minutes of the meeting in the Public Record Office. However, his letter to his wife on 16 September gives an indication of his probable feelings. "Our mission was so very nearly a success; it is sad that it has ended as such a grim failure".<sup>127</sup> Concerning defence negotiations, the Chiefs of Staff were told that, ". . . it could not be expected that the U.K. Delegation would be able to go to India and Pakistan to discuss defence arrangements at least until after the 31st December 1947".<sup>128</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff heard no more about the possibility of joint defence negotiations until 19 January 1948. They were informed that Mountbatten thought that the talks might take place before very long and it might be appropriate for the JPS to review the draft brief previously approved.<sup>129</sup> Indeed Mountbatten was doing everything in his power to try to bring these talks to fruition. If effort were the criterion than the Chiefs of Staff certainly could not fault

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126. COS(47)120th Mtg, Min 9, Ibid.

127. Sir Ronald Wingate, Lord Ismay: A Biography, (London, 1970), p. 167.

128. COS(47)125th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/7.

129. COS(48)9th Mtg, Min 4, DEFE 4/10.

Mountbatten. During the row over whether or not these negotiations should take place before or after the transfer of power the previous July, he had insisted that future defence negotiations should be left in his hands. Starting in December, he began a desperate struggle to deliver on his promise.

On 30 January 1948 Lieutenant Colonel V.K. Erskine Crum, Mountbatten's conference secretary, sent Hollis a letter with several attached memoranda. One of the attached memoranda was a request from the JDC for the Chiefs of Staff asking for the topics to be covered in the proposed joint defence negotiations. Also included was a memorandum written by Mountbatten as a tentative reply from the Chiefs of Staff to the JDC. Erskine Crum's letter explained the sequence of events that had produced these two documents. On 8 December 1947 at a meeting of the JDC, Mountbatten had proposed that the Council should consider the question of joint defence against aggression. This proposal had been approved and Mountbatten had been given the task of preparing a memorandum on this issue. The JDC considered Mountbatten's memorandum on 22 December. The memorandum recommended that India and Pakistan should: have their top military advisers meet for preliminary discussions, agree that the JDC was a properly constituted body to co-ordinate defence policy at the highest level and consider inviting the British military delegation for tripartite talks. The Prime Ministers of the two dominions tried to back out of any agreement along these lines, but Mountbatten seized upon a chance comment and suggested that he should write a memorandum requesting that the British delegation specify what points they intended to raise. Mountbatten's memorandum along these lines was approved for despatch to the Chiefs of Staff at a subsequent meeting of the JDC.

Therefore, the primary object in sending this memorandum is not so much in order to bring about the early arrival of the British Delegation (although, it is Lord Mountbatten's sincere hope and intention that this should come before his departure from India, the date for which has now been settled as 21st June, 1948); as to keep alive the whole subject of joint defence between the two Dominions as well as tripartite defence negotiations.<sup>130</sup>

Erskine Crum continued that Mountbatten had carefully drafted the suggested reply to his own memorandum. It was suggested that this memorandum not be amended as Mountbatten considered that his proposed reply represented the maximum that could be said without raising opposition from the two governments. He also stressed that Mountbatten thought that a great deal could be accomplished around the table once the British delegates had arrived. Finally Erskine Crum requested that no mention be made of the origin of the Chiefs' of Staff reply to the JDC in any official documents.

Mountbatten's draft reply stressed that the British Chiefs' of Staff delegation would be concerned with the size and level of modernization of the dominions' armed forces, with creating joint plans for the rest of the Commonwealth to come to the aid of the subcontinent in the event of aggression, with the need to maintain bases and communications including air facilities and the exchange of liaison staff officers.<sup>131</sup> It was considered by the Chiefs of Staff at their meeting on 25 February.<sup>132</sup> In a minute from Stapleton to Hollis prior to this meeting, Stapleton recounted:

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130. Letter from Erskine Crum to Hollis, 30 January 1948, DEFE 11/31.

131. Draft Reply to the Joint Defence Council of India and Pakistan, no date, Ibid.

132. JP(48)10, withheld, DEFE 6/5 and DEFE 4/11, considered at COS(48)27th Mtg, Min 1, withheld, DEFE 4/11.

You will see that the Joint Planning Staff have accepted Viscount Mountbatten's proposed reply as it stands, although if left to themselves they would probably have altered it substantially. The question is primarily one of tactics and the Joint Planning Staff felt that Viscount Mountbatten was in the best position to judge the sort of approach likely to be acceptable to the Indian Leaders. The Commonwealth Relations Office were also prepared to accept Mountbatten's draft without amendment.

. . . The Joint Planning Staff have not . . . explained in their paper who the real author of the draft reply is. It will accordingly be necessary for you to explain the background to this subject to the Chiefs of Staff at their meeting on this subject on Wednesday, 25th February.<sup>133</sup>

The report was approved. Copies were sent to the service liaison staffs from South Africa, Canada, New Zealand and Australia on 6 March.<sup>134</sup> The report was also despatched via the Commonwealth Relations Office to the Joint Defence Council on 25 March.<sup>135</sup>

All of these efforts were to no avail, however. On 12 April, the Chiefs of Staff learned that as of 1 April the Joint Defence Council had ceased to exist.<sup>136</sup> It had been replaced by the much lower key Inter-Dominion Secretaries Committee. The Chiefs' of Staff goal of joint defence negotiations with the successor states of the Raj was once more banished into limbo. Ismay had been right in his observation the previous August that he saw no connection between the JDC and the Chiefs of Staff in Britain.

All of Britain's attempts at strategic co-operation in South Asia

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133. Meeting brief, Stapleton to Hollis, 23 February 1948, DEFE 11/13.

134. Short cover notes to South African, New Zealand, Canadian, and Australian liaison staffs, 6 March 1948, Ibid.

135. See marginal notes on Draft Reply to the Joint Defence Council of India and Pakistan, Ibid.

136. COS(48)51st Mtg, Min 8, DEFE 4/12.

had not suffered the same fate as those with India and Pakistan, however. Ceylon had proved quite amenable to meeting the desires of the Chiefs of Staff as it progressed towards independence. Ceylon accepted a defence agreement with Britain on 11 November 1947. In accordance with the Chiefs of Staff desires no time had been set on the treaty's duration.<sup>137</sup> The agreement in very general language had given Britain access to bases and facilities in Ceylon in exchange for agreeing to assist Ceylon in the development of its armed forces.<sup>138</sup> Ceylon had gained its independence on 4 February 1948. Subsequently the JPS had prepared a report on "Defence of Ceylon" for use by British representatives in preliminary discussions with Ceylonese ministers. The primary concern of the report was that agreements under the mutual defence pact should not reflect adversely on Ceylon's position as an independent country. With this end in mind, the report recommended that agreements should be in the form of letters exchanged between the two governments.<sup>139</sup>

The co-operative spirit of Ceylon on defence issues seemed to rival that of New Zealand. The Vice Chief of the Air Staff, Air Marshal Sir James Robb, was nominated to represent the Chiefs of Staff at the opening of defence discussions with the representative of the Ceylonese government, Sir Oliver Goonitilleke.<sup>140</sup> The meeting had taken place at the Commonwealth Relations Office with Mr. Patrick

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137. COS(47)94th Mtg, Min 1, 28 July 1947, DEFE 4/5.

138. For the text of the agreement see Harvey, Consultation and Co-operation, p. 275.

139. JP(48)21(Final), 19 March 1948, DEFE 6/5.

140. COS(48)53rd Mtg, Min 2, 16 April 1948, DEFE 4/12.



Gordon Walker representing the British government. Robb had opened the meeting with a statement of the strategic importance of Ceylon.

Sir Oliver Goonitilleke had appeared to respond well to this statement though he had said that Ceylon would not be able to devote any large proportion of her revenue to defence purposes and would have to look to the Commonwealth for protection. . . . Although Ceylon would not be able to make much financial contribution to defence, Sir Oliver Goonitilleke had volunteered the statement that she would be willing to contribute to Commonwealth defence and manpower both inside Ceylon and elsewhere.<sup>141</sup>

With the excellent harbour at Trincomalee for the Royal Navy and air facilities for the Royal Air Force, good relations with the new Dominion of Ceylon must have seemed to be an oasis amid the troubles that the Chiefs of Staff were experiencing with the successors of the Raj.

Two other defence issues relating to India and Pakistan captured the Chiefs' of Staff attention prior to the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting in October. The first of these was the familiar issue of how to treat India and Pakistan with regard to classified information. On 16 April the Vice Chiefs of Staff proposed downgrading India and Pakistan from category "A" to category "B" for top secret information of British origin. They minuted the Minister of Defence to this effect and requested that he bring this matter before the Defence Committee.<sup>142</sup> The issue was again raised on 3 May with respect to the admission of students from India and Pakistan to British service courses. In this instance while the War Office and Air Ministry were willing to accept these students at their staff

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141. COS(48)54th Mtg, Min 3, 19 April 1948, Ibid.

142. COS(48)53rd Mtg, Min 5, Ibid.

colleges, the Admiralty was not because of the secret material dealt with. The Vice Chiefs of Staff decided that they should present a united front on this issue. They referred the issue to the Commonwealth Relations Office with the suggestion that positions for 1949 might be deferred on the grounds that defence negotiations have not yet taken place.<sup>143</sup> On 18 June the Vice Chiefs became quite upset when they discovered that the Commonwealth Relations Office was attempting to circumvent their previous recommendation that India and Pakistan should be downgraded to category "B". They again strongly recommended that the issue should be brought before the Defence Committee.<sup>144</sup> On 15 July the issue was considered by the Defence Committee. Both the minutes of this meeting and the papers presented by the Chiefs of Staff and the Commonwealth Relations Office have been withheld in the Public Record Office.<sup>145</sup> The results of this meeting can be gleaned from the Vice Chiefs' of Staff meeting on 9 August when they considered two telegrams prepared by the Commonwealth Relations Office.

The Chiefs of Staff have only one amendment to suggest to either of these two telegrams. In the one containing a message to the Prime Ministers of India and Pakistan it is stated that ". . . it is only right to let you know that it will be necessary to withhold the disclosure of some information of a Top Secret nature." As you know, it is not only Top Secret information, but classified information generally which we may have to withhold from the new dominions, so the statement as it stands is not quite accurate. The Chiefs of Staff think it would be better to alter the phrase to read ". . . some information of a secret nature" - using the word "secret" in its

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143. COS(48)61st Mtg, Min 5, DEFE 4/13.

144. COS(48)83rd Mtg, Min 8, Annex V, Ibid.

145. DO(48)11th Mtg, Min 2, withheld, CAB 131/5. The papers referred to in Annex 5 of the previous note appear to be DO(48)56 and 57 both withheld in CAB 131/6.

non-technical sense as is done in the first sentence of the telegram.<sup>146</sup>

The other issue that captured the Chiefs of Staff attention prior to the Prime Ministers' Meeting was the renewed prospect of defence negotiations in South Asia. The resurrection of the possibility of such talks from the limbo to which they had been assigned as a result of the disbandment of the Joint Defence Council resulted from an approach by Pakistan. At a Staff Conference on 24 September, Attlee informed the Chiefs of Staff:

that General Cawthorn, the Deputy Chief of the Pakistan Army, had told the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations that Liaquat Ali Khan had charged him with a very secret mission to enquire whether we would engage on staff conversations with Pakistan. He favoured falling in with this proposal, provided we kept India informed.<sup>147</sup>

As a result, on 29 September the Chiefs of Staff met with General Cawthorn. In his opening remarks Lord Tedder noted that while defence talks between India, Pakistan and the United Kingdom had been agreed in principle by the three Prime Ministers they had not yet taken place, nor was it possible to see when they might. In reply:

GENERAL CAWTHORN said that in his opinion, Pakistan wanted to know what would be expected of them in the event of a war breaking out. He did not doubt that Pakistan would join the Allies. Pakistan was also, he thought, willing to open defence discussions with the United Kingdom Government. The extent of the ground to be covered in these discussions had already been submitted to the Prime Minister of Pakistan.<sup>148</sup>

This last reference was to JP(48)10. Discussion then ranged over the problem of attendance of Pakistani students at British service

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146. COS(48)11th Mtg, Min 2, Annex II, DEFE 4/15.

147. COS(48)137th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/16.

148. COS(48)139th Mtg, Min 3, Ibid.

schools. A complication in this issue pointed out by General Cawthorn was that the United States had offered certain positions at their own service schools and it appeared that the Pakistan government would be accepting these positions. This left the British Chiefs of Staff in the peculiar situation of denying access to their own schools to protect information from American sources while the Americans were offering their own invitations to Pakistan. The meeting concluded that the situation would have to be reviewed with the possibility that Pakistani students might be again offered certain positions on the understanding that because of British obligations to the Americans they would have to be excluded from some of the lectures.

The possibility to defence negotiations with Pakistan, and it might be hoped with India as well, provided an encouraging backdrop for the Prime Ministers' Meeting that was scheduled to begin in two weeks time. The situation with respect to South Asia at this time, thus bore certain similarities to that which confronted the Chiefs of Staff in their dealings with the colonial empire. In both the last year had been largely a period of stagnation and frustration with regard to incorporating them into Commonwealth defence. Now on the eve of the 1948 Prime Ministers' Meeting, the Colonial Office was to be integrated into the JIC and there was again a prospect of progress in South Asia. Neither of these developments was momentous in itself, but both augured well for the future.

## Chapter 6: Commonwealth Defence Takes Off: October 1948 - June 1949

As in 1946 the attempt to create a viable system of Commonwealth defence was one of the principal reasons for calling the Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1948. The American stimulus of the preceding twelve months had marked a major step forward in British plans for postwar Commonwealth defence which had always been predicated on the active support of the United States. The growing tensions of the Cold War in 1948 added a further impetus to the need to bring these plans to fruition. Unfortunately, the hopes of the 1946 Prime Ministers' Meeting had not borne fruit. The defence liaison system had been established, but the political will to make it work had not materialized. Bevin had seen the importance of insuring that the requisite political will was incorporated into the Washington talks the previous October and the results of military co-operation backed by political endorsement had proved extremely gratifying. Two and a half years after the Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1946 the need to inject political will into the defence liaison system that that meeting had endorsed became the immediate concern<sup>of</sup> British policy makers in their attempt to construct a viable system of Commonwealth defence.

### Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1948: Commonwealth Ideology and the Cold War

As far back as 9 March 1948 the Chiefs of Staff had put their finger on the problem. In discussing their policy towards Western Europe in preparation for the planning talks with the Americans that

led to Plan Doublequick, the Chiefs of Staff concluded:

Defence collaboration between the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth countries was at present stultified by the lack of a common defence policy. In the present international situation it was essential that there should be discussions on the highest level between the United Kingdom and the Commonwealth countries on defence matters, and it seemed that the only satisfactory method of achieving this was holding some form of Commonwealth conference in the very near future.<sup>1</sup>

On 10 May the Chiefs of Staff considered a report by their secretariat on the reasons for the comparative failure of the Commonwealth defence liaison system. They were unanimous in endorsing the report's analysis of the reasons for this failure. Planning with the Americans accentuated the need to improve defence planning with the old dominions. It also seemed to provide a means for doing so. As Tedder noted, "political acquiescence of the Governments concerned to Plan 'Doublequick' being discussed by the Commonwealth Service Representatives would be the most advantageous course and the quickest way in which to initiate action on defence issues". The Chiefs of Staff instructed Hollis to consult with the Secretary of the Cabinet and the Permanent Secretary of the Ministry of Defence on the best means of resolving this problem.<sup>2</sup>

On 26 May the Chiefs of Staff learned that their report approved at the previous meeting had become the basis for discussions between the Secretary of the Cabinet and the Permanent Secretaries of the Treasury and the Foreign Office. They also learned that a proposal for a meeting of dominion Prime Ministers possibly as early as June was

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1. COS(48)34th Mtg; DEFE 4/11.

2. COS(48)63rd Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/13.

being considered. As a result they instructed the JPS to prepare a strategic review for dominion Prime Ministers.<sup>3</sup>

Events did not move nearly so quickly, but the Chiefs of Staff had inexorably set the wheels of Whitehall in motion. On 17 July, Sir Norman Brook the Cabinet Secretary wrote a long memorandum for Attlee:

The Chiefs of Staff Secretariat and the Joint Planning Staff have recently reviewed the working of the machinery for Commonwealth liaison on defence which was established in 1947 on the basis outlined in the White Paper on Post-War Organisation for Defence (Cmd. 6923). The conclusion reached as a result of their review (cf. J.P.(48)71 attached) is that, in spite of the establishment of this machinery, no progress had been made towards the effective co-ordination of Commonwealth defence policy. On defence questions there is closer co-operation to-day between the United Kingdom and the United States than there is between the United Kingdom and the other self-governing parts of the Commonwealth. This is not due to any substantial difference in the machinery for military liaison, at the technical level, in the two cases; for the Commonwealth liaison system was modelled closely on the organisation of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. It was due to the fact that there is closer contact and more common understanding of defence aims and policy between the Governments of the United Kingdom and the United States. . . . Between Commonwealth Governments, on the other hand, there has been no continuity of political discussion about the aims and objectives of defence policy; and for this reason the corresponding machinery for military liaison at the technical level has not come to life. There have, for example, been no politico-military discussions with Commonwealth Governments at the political level similar to the Washington talks of October last. The new liaison system for Commonwealth defence has not begun to function because it has not been given any work of major importance.<sup>4</sup>

Brook continued saying that this view was endorsed not only by the Chiefs of Staff, but also by the Foreign Office. He recommended closer

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3. COS(48)72nd Mtg, Min 4, Confidential Annex, Ibid.

4. Minute from Sir Norman Brook to the Prime Minister, 17 July 1948, annexed to minutes of an informal meeting of Ministers, 28 July 1948, PREM 8/951.

Commonwealth consultation on foreign policy and more frequent meetings of Commonwealth Prime Ministers. At an informal meeting with Bevin, Cripps, Alexander and Noel Baker on 28 July, Attlee strongly endorsed the conclusions put forward by Brook.

The report mentioned by Brook in his minute to the Prime Minister, JP(48)71, did not appear on the Chiefs of Staff agenda until 18 August. The gravamen of the report appeared in paragraph 7:

The International situation has deteriorated to such an extent since the last Meeting of the Dominion Prime Ministers and the ability of the United Nations to impose its will has proved so slight that we have been forced into Long Term and Emergency Planning with both the United States and the Western Union Countries. It is unthinkable that we should continue such plans without parallel planning within the British Commonwealth. Moreover, we have had to assume in our planning certain substantial Commonwealth contributions towards the forces required for the Defence of the three Pillars of our Strategy. Without confirmation that these contributions will be forthcoming our planning must remain largely unrealistic and possibly dangerous. This necessarily also affects American plans as well as our own, and the Americans rely upon us for this information.<sup>5</sup>

The report concluded:

- (a) The reason why the present system of Defence Liaison had not worked so far is that political guidance and impetus have been lacking.
- (b) It is quite essential that Commonwealth Defence co-operation should be made to work in step with that with America and the Western Union.
- (c) There are no advantages in reorganising the existing liaison staffs on the lines of the Western Union Defence Organisation.

Hollis took exception to the report, however, arguing for more formal machinery for Commonwealth defence planning. "He did not think that

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5. JP(48)71(Final), 3 July 1948, DEFE 6/6.



Commonwealth countries would be satisfied if no formal machinery existed for them to take part in the formulation of strategic policy. The present liaison system was in his opinion inadequate in its present form to carry this out".<sup>6</sup> The Vice Chiefs endorsed Hollis's view and asked him to prepare a report.

At their next meeting on 20 August, they considered Hollis's minute. They amended it to read:

It is suggested that the first step in this direction should be to seek, as soon as possible, the political agreement of the Commonwealth Governments on the broad lines of Commonwealth strategic policy and that unrestricted military discussions and planning should be allowed to take place between the respective military representatives without commitment to Governments. It would seem appropriate that this agreement should be sought at the forthcoming Commonwealth Conference to be held in October at which an appropriate directive to the Military Staffs could be adopted.<sup>7</sup>

Such a proposal if accepted would mark the first time in Commonwealth history that such close defence co-operation had ever been accepted. The committee instructed Hollis to convey their ideas to the secretary of the Cabinet. As a result of these discussions, talks were started with the Commonwealth military liaison staffs in London, but it was decided that it would be best not to rush such an important issue and formal approval would not be sought from the other Commonwealth governments until the Prime Ministers' meeting.<sup>8</sup>

It is important to remember the context in which these

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6. COS(48)115th Mtg, Min 4, DEFE 4/15.

7. COS(48)116th Mtg, Min 3, Ibid.

8. COS(48)120th Mtg, Min 7, 27 August 1948, Ibid.

preparations for greater Commonwealth defence co-operation were taking place. June had seen the start of both the Malayan emergency and the Berlin Airlift. The threat of war seemed real. On 1 September the Chiefs of Staff concluded that the threat of war in the next five years can no longer be dismissed. They also discussed the need for local forces to deal promptly with the threat of Communist subversion in British territories.<sup>9</sup>

Against this uneasy background, on 14 September, the Chiefs of Staff considered the three papers that they planned to put before the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting. These three papers included a global strategic review, a paper on Commonwealth defence co-operation and a paper concerning the co-operation of India and Pakistan in Commonwealth defence. The global strategic review, JP(48)70, advocated:

In war we should aim to (i) Secure the integrity of the Commonwealth countries. (ii) Mount a strategic air offensive from the United Kingdom and the Middle East. (iii) Hold the enemy as far east as possible in Western Europe. (iv) Maintain a firm hold on the Middle East. (v) Control essential sea communications.<sup>10</sup>

This report shows both the continuity and the evolution of British strategic thought. The three pillars of DO(47)44 are still there albeit the defence of the United Kingdom is veiled in the need to maintain the security of all Commonwealth countries. Added to these three pillars are the clear expression of the intention to mount a strategic air offensive and the need to hold the enemy as far east in

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9. COS(48)121st Mtg, Min 4, Ibid.

10. JP(48)70(Final) considered at COS(48)128th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/16.

Europe as possible. The latter point reflected the compromise on a continental commitment agreed the previous March before the second round of strategic planning talks in Washington. The Chiefs of Staff approved this paper for submission to the Defence Committee as DO(48)61.<sup>11</sup>

The second paper on Commonwealth defence co-operation raised quite a bit of disagreement. This paper, written by the Chiefs of Staff secretariat, called for the dominion service liaison staffs in London to form a formal working party to discuss a common defence policy. The First Sea Lord and the VCIGS both pointed out the problems with such an approach. A compromise was reached in which suggestions for various forms of Commonwealth co-operation on defence would be put forward in the paper. From these suggestions it was hoped that the dominions would themselves pick up on the idea of some sort of informal working party to address the larger questions of general defence policy, cold war policy and supply policy. The Chiefs of Staff directed that the paper be rewritten to incorporate this compromise and submitted to the Defence Committee as DO(48)62.<sup>12</sup>

The third paper on defence co-operation with India, Pakistan and Ceylon sought to get the government to make a clear decision on the handling of classified information with respect to these countries. In effect the report argued that for defence planning purposes there would have to be "two" Commonwealths:

We realise the answer raises the greatest political

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11. DO(48)61, CAB 131/6.

12. COS(48)128th Mtg, Min 4, DEFE 4/16. DO(48)62, CAB 131/6.

issues. It equally affects the security and strength of the Commonwealth. We already know from unofficial soundings that neither Canada or South Africa would participate in the Working Party recommended to further Commonwealth Defence planning if either India or Pakistan are invited to become members of the Working Party.<sup>13</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff approved this report for submission to the Defence Committee as DO(48)63.<sup>14</sup>

The Defence Committee considered these three papers on 16 September. Under Bevin's lead the committee performed some fairly drastic surgery on the DO(48)61 and DO(48)62. It was agreed that the Cabinet secretariat would revise and amalgamate these two reports and that Attlee would then send the result to dominion Prime Ministers so that they could give it their consideration prior to the Prime Ministers' Meeting. As far as DO(48)63 on defence co-operation with the new South Asian dominions it was, "Agreed that the question of the extent to which the new Dominions could be brought into further defence discussions should be decided in the light of the attitude which their representatives adopted at the meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers".<sup>15</sup>

The paper that resulted from the amalgamation of DO(48)61 and DO(48)62 became the cornerstone for defence planning at the Prime Ministers' Meeting.<sup>16</sup> The paper opened by advocating the need for collective security on a regional basis in the light of the United

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13. DO(48)63, CAB 131/6.

14. COS(48)128th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/16.

15. DO(48)19th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/5.

16. PMM(48)1, CAB 133/88.

Nations failure to make collective security a reality on a global basis. The paper clearly laid the blame for the cold war at the door of the Soviet Union. In the face of the Soviet threat the report declared economic recovery, political resistance to Communism and unity with the United States, Western Europe and the Commonwealth as the policy of the British government. The paper then rounded onto the argument that the Chiefs of Staff had been endorsing since the previous March:

If, therefore an adequate defence system is to be built up, which will enable the countries of the Commonwealth to live in security and exercise their rightful influence in world affairs and will lessen their dependence on any outside source, an essential preliminary will be the requisite degree of political agreement between the respective Commonwealth Governments on basic objectives of policy.

Once agreement has been reached in the political field it will then be possible, with the agreement of the Commonwealth Governments concerned, to allow the study of defence problems by the military staffs to proceed on a joint basis . . .

The forthcoming Meeting would afford a suitable opportunity for a discussion of the problems dealt with in this memorandum and the United Kingdom Government would welcome an expression of the views of Commonwealth Ministers on these at the Meeting.

Attached to this paper was an appendix by the Chiefs of Staff on "Commonwealth Defence Co-operation". In paragraph two, the appendix contained the fundamentals of defence policy from JP(48)70. The appendix then suggested that defence co-operation was required on two levels, regional and overall, thus reflecting the Chiefs' of Staff compromise over DO(48)62 on 14 September. The appendix concluded by again emphasizing the need for political authority to make military planning effective and suggesting that if that authority was forthcoming then the next step would be exchanges of visits of

planning staffs. The success of the 1948 Prime Ministers' Meeting can be judged against the goals set out by British policy makers in this paper.

The Prime Ministers' Meeting opened on 11 October. At the opening session Attlee stressed the need for secrecy in their deliberations to facilitate the free exchange of information. The second session the same day followed with the Chancellor of the Exchequer giving a survey of the current economic situation. The third and fourth sessions on 12 October were devoted to foreign affairs. Here Bevin left no doubt about the one country that was a major threat to world peace. On 13 October the conference again returned to economic affairs. The conference then adjourned until the following Monday.<sup>17</sup>

Attlee opened the meeting of the second week with a tactful plea for a greater degree of Commonwealth consultation. He said that he was not seeking a uniform Commonwealth foreign policy and discussion of defence was deferred. The next day, on 19 October, the discussions focused on recent developments in Europe.<sup>18</sup>

Thus after setting the stage with a full discussion of economics and foreign affairs and a tentative sounding on the need for greater Commonwealth consultation, Attlee opened the eleventh session on 20 October with his own detailed statement on Commonwealth defence. "MR. ATTLEE said that the discussion on foreign affairs had been an essential preliminary to the consideration of defence problems". He

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17. PMM(48)1st - 6th Mtgs, CAB 133/88.

18. PMM(48)7th - 10th Mtgs, Ibid.

then detailed the important historic role that had been played by the Royal Navy in securing international peace. The advent of air power, however, meant that the United Kingdom which had formerly been a secure island base was now the most vulnerable part of the Commonwealth. He said that efforts to build effective collective security through the United Nations had proved unsuccessful.

The most striking and tragic conclusion which had emerged from the discussions on foreign affairs was that there was one Power which was not interested in reaching a settlement of international differences by peaceful means. The Soviet Union had a vested interest in chaos.

He said that the United Kingdom had set as its highest priority the building of a firm economic foundation. To this end it was co-operating with the United States and the other countries of Western Europe in the European Recovery Programme. The next step which the United Kingdom had started by entering into the Western Union was to build a basis for security against aggression.

The United Kingdom Government was anxious to extend this system of co-operation in defence consultation to the Commonwealth generally. No doubt, defence co-operation must in the first instance be on a regional basis. . . . But the way in which the interests of the different areas interacted had been brought out in the earlier discussions and there was need to ensure co-ordination between the defence policies of the different regions. That did not mean subordination, but a free partnership for mutual help.

Attlee's statement is useful as a bench-mark of his thinking on Commonwealth strategy in the midst of the cold war. Gone is his earlier strong belief in the United Nations as a means of preserving global security within the foreseeable future. In its place he now argues for stronger defence co-operation within the Commonwealth. Whereas in 1946 the primary emphasis had been on regional co-operation, he now said that even in a regional system there must be

some form of central co-ordination.<sup>19</sup>

Alexander and Tedder followed Attlee. Alexander discussed the difficulties created by the financial burden of Britain's postwar defence commitments in seeking economic recovery. He also made a general statement on the importance of Britain's co-operation with the United States and Western Union in providing greater security. Tedder concentrated on the difficulties created by the cold war. After discussing the basic outlines of Commonwealth strategy as seen by the British Chiefs of Staff, he concluded, "If . . . Ministers could give authority for their military advisers to consult on this specific problem and to draft concerted plans, without committing their Governments, an advance would have been made towards filling a dangerous gap in the armour against aggression".

The favourable climate created by the cold war for Commonwealth defence as envisaged by the British Chiefs of Staff now became obvious in the responses of the dominion representatives. The Canadian representative, Mr. St. Laurent, strongly endorsed the idea of regional defence planning. He said that Canada was already actively involved. Dr. Evatt representing Australia offered a different line of approach arguing for the importance of the United Nations and hoping that current tensions with the Soviet Union might not be permanent. This approach found little support from Peter Fraser, the New Zealand Prime Minister, who spoke next:

He did not deny the importance of supporting the United Nations; but in his view a meeting of Commonwealth Prime Ministers had equal importance. If Commonwealth

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19. PMM(48)11th Mtg, Ibid.



Governments agreed on unity and on the need for pooling their resources in time of trouble, a major contribution towards world peace would have been achieved. . . . The universal sense of danger underlined the need for co-operation; and he hoped that all Commonwealth Governments would recognise the need for mutual co-operation and consultation in the defence field.<sup>20</sup>

On this note the morning session adjourned.

In the afternoon session, Mr. Louw, representing South Africa, opened by expounding on the threat of communism and expressing agreement with the United Kingdom's proposals for regional planning. South Africa did not interpret the term "regional" too narrowly and considered all of Africa to be within their area of regional interest as well as being sensitive to the importance of the Middle East. He was followed by Sir Godfrey Huggins of Southern Rhodesia who "accepted P.M.M. (48) 1 in its entirety". Pandit Nehru, though more cautious,

. . . agreed that it should be made plain to would-be aggressors that war would be unprofitable, and he emphasised that India would permit no incursion into her territory or into the regions around it. To secure this she was prepared to co-operate with other members of the Commonwealth and share the burdens which such co-operation would impose.

Mr. Liaquat Ali Khan strongly endorsed the need for Commonwealth defence. He concluded that, "while there must be regional defence schemes, including a scheme for the defence of vital Middle East countries, such schemes must fit into wider plans for the defence of the Commonwealth as a whole." Mr. Senanayake, the Prime Minister of Ceylon, stressed Ceylon's weakness, but stressed that his country "would take her full share in fighting the 'cold' war". Such a unanimous and seemingly spontaneous outpouring of support for

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20. Ibid.

Commonwealth defence after the struggle to achieve consensus at the 1946 Prime Ministers' Meeting and the difficulties of building upon that narrow consensus, must have truly amazed and delighted British policy makers. Alexander said:

It was clear that all Commonwealth countries were willing to give political authority for defence planning to proceed at least on a regional basis and, in view of the general agreement on political objectives, it should now be possible for the military staffs to proceed with the study of defence problems on a joint basis, on the understanding that no Commonwealth Government would be committed in advance to acceptance of any particular solution which might emerge.

Attlee concluded the session by suggesting, "officials of the delegations should, in the light of the discussion, draw up a statement about consultation on defence matters which could be included in the proposed general statement on Commonwealth consultation".<sup>21</sup>

The meeting continued with a discussion of two drafts on Commonwealth consultation that had been placed before them, one by the conference secretaries and the other by Dr. Evatt. Evatt's draft quickly gained ascendancy over that provided by the conference secretaries.<sup>22</sup> The secretaries were instructed to use Evatt's proposal to provide a revised draft for the next meeting.

The revised draft was considered the next morning.<sup>23</sup> Opposition

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21. PMM(48)12th Mtg, Ibid.

22. PMM(48)13, draft on Commonwealth Consultation prepared by the secretaries; PMM(48)15, draft on Commonwealth Consultation by Dr. Evatt; both Ibid.

23. PMM(48)16, Ibid.

to defence co-operation now came from the South African representative. He wanted only the term consultation and not co-operation included in the draft. "MR. LOUW thought the latter [consultation] sufficient in itself, and stated that the Union Government could not be committed to any co-operation necessarily developing out of the consultation on defence matters . . . ". Fraser and Evatt both reacted strongly to this proposal.

Speaking for New Zealand, he [Fraser] would say that if the United Kingdom were defeated in war, it would only be a question of time before New Zealand fell too. . . . DR. EVATT agreed with Mr. Fraser and emphasised that consultation which did not lead to co-operation could be positively dangerous.

The same three protagonists continued the debate to include the relationship between regional defence and an overall strategic plan. Fraser and Evatt did not want regional defence to be emphasized to the exclusion of overall planning while Louw thought an agreement on regional defence was sufficient. Tedder joined the argument by pointing out that while the Western Union countries had set out to frame strictly a regional defence agreement, they had soon come to the conclusion that this would only be possible in the context of an overall plan for global security. Bevin weighed in with the observation that "the defence of Africa was of the greatest importance in world strategy, and it was difficult to see how it could be a matter of regional concern". Gradually consensus building returned. "MR. NEHRU, MR. LIAQUAT ALI KHAN and MR. SENANAYAKE also made the point that their Governments were anxious for close consultation in defence matters. MR. ATTLEE said that this was also the desire of the United Kingdom Government". Evatt's draft was referred back to the

officials for redrafting.<sup>24</sup>

The final session approved the redraft the next day. Paragraph six on defence read:

In defence matters there will be close consultation and collaboration between the Commonwealth Governments having a common interest in the security of a particular region. The military advisers of those Governments will consult together to frame proposals and plans for submission to their respective Governments.

Meetings of Defence Ministers will be arranged, as occasion demands, to discuss problems arising from these regional consultations and to review the progress made.

In the system of Commonwealth Service Liaison Officers there already exists machinery for the exchange of military information of general interest, and Commonwealth Governments will consider how that machinery can be improved to render it fully effective as a means of exchanging information about the progress of the regional defence plans and securing the maximum appropriate degree of defence co-ordination.<sup>25</sup>

In a brief for Attlee on these paragraphs Prook had explained the delicate compromises that had been agreed among officials to arrive at this statement. He told Attlee that he hoped no changes would be made as changes would invariably upset the balance. He also explained some of the clandestine logic behind this statement:

For your information, there is a special reason for putting the second paragraph in its present place - for, if meetings of Defence Ministers are suggested primarily in relation to regional plans, we can get over some of the difficulties about the communication of strategic information to the newer Dominions. The concluding words of paragraph 6 are designed to work in a reference to the dove-tailing of regional plans into a "single master design".<sup>26</sup>

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24. PMM(48)13th Mtg, Ibid.

25. PMM(48)16 (Revise), Ibid.

26. Brief for Prime Minister on PMM(48)16 by Brook, 21 October 1948, PREM 8/951.

The participants agreed that their respective governments should make decisions on the recommendations for increased consultation as quickly as possible, but by the end of November in any event. No country was to publish any account of these agreements during that time.

One imagines that Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff were both cautiously pleased with the results of this conference. If the main goal had been to create the political will to allow peacetime planning between Commonwealth Chiefs of Staff then it would ultimately prove to have been a success. From the point of view of Commonwealth history this was a marked achievement. Never before had there been concerted defence planning in peacetime between the United Kingdom and the dominions. What is more, this planning was to lead to peacetime military commitments on the part of the dominions, but here we are getting ahead of events. The line of march between the Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1948 and greater defence co-operation was not straight. At the close of the conference no firm commitments had been made, hence the suspected caution on the part of Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff over its results. Events would ultimately indicate their degree of success. Nevertheless, the seeming consensus at the conference and the tentative agreement for greater co-operation in defence mark the 1948 Prime Ministers' Meeting as a major event in the evolution of postwar Commonwealth defence.

#### British Brokerage of Free World Strategic Planning

The significance of the Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1948 for postwar Commonwealth defence becomes apparent when placed in the

context of British attempts to co-ordinate planning with the Americans and to find a viable means of protecting Western Europe. The interlocking nature of the broad sweep of Commonwealth defence with various schemes of regional defence has already been seen in the debates at the Prime Ministers' Meeting. Once again the encroaching hand of the American stimulus of the past year is apparent. British strategic planners sought to balance greater American material strength against what they perceived as their own superior diplomatic and strategic skills. As Sir John Slessor, then Commandant of the Imperial Defence College, had told his audience at the United States Air War College in April 1948:

We in Britain are quite ready to accept U.S. leadership in this modern world; but the U.S. must treat us as a true partner and make use of our political and diplomatic 'know-how' which is just as superior to that of the U.S. as American technical 'know-how' is superior to ours.<sup>27</sup>

To maintain British power it was necessary to maintain British influence. Britain must act as the brains to co-ordinate free world muscle. The fact that America contained most of that muscle meant that American interests must be given first priority over all other interests. We have already seen one manifestation of this in the debate of the treatment of classified information with respect to the new dominions in South Asia. To make the system work, British planners needed to present themselves to the Americans as the interlocuters of the free world's strategic chorus line. Obtaining the increased co-operation of the dominions in October 1948 was a vital element in

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27. Sir John C. Slessor, The Great Deterrent: A Collection of Lectures, Articles, and Broadcasts on the Development of Strategic Policy in the Nuclear Age. (London, 1957) p. 93.

British plans for Commonwealth defence.

As early as the Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1946 we saw Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff attempting to place themselves in a co-ordinating position between the dominions and the United States. The issue had been American use of Commonwealth owned bases in the Pacific. The advent of strategic planning with the Americans after the Washington talks in October 1947, however, opened far greater opportunities for pursuing this goal than had previously existed. On 19 April 1948, the Vice Chiefs of Staff had approved a Foreign Office brief prepared for Mr. M.E. Dening who was about to depart for Canada, Australia and New Zealand in an attempt to arrange for co-ordinated planning with the Americans in the Far East. It was hoped that it might be possible to arrange further talks to take place between the interested parties in Washington. Among the additions to the brief recommended by the Chiefs of Staff was the hope, "that provision will be made for discussion between the United Kingdom and Dominion representatives before the official talks take place in Washington, perhaps a few days before meeting the Americans".<sup>28</sup> In the same vein, in their first discussion of Plan Doublequick, Sir John Cunningham said, "he thought that there should be a full exchange with the Americans of J.P.S. and J.I.C. papers on the plans to meet Russian aggression. It would also be necessary to bring in the Planning Staffs of the Commonwealth countries".<sup>29</sup>

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28. COS(48)54th Mtg, Min 1 and Annex I, DEFE 4/12.

29. COS(48)62nd Mtg, Min 2, 5 May 1948, DEFE 4/13.

With the creation of the Western European Union in March 1948, Britain had to consider co-ordination with her continental allies as well as the Commonwealth. In discussing the complexities of Britain's position between the United States, her continental allies and the Commonwealth, the Chiefs of Staff, "Agreed that the Joint Planning Staff should be kept informed of the assumptions under which co-operation between the individual U.K. and Allied Services was conducted so as to ensure that the basis and progress of co-operation was in harmony with the policy of the Chiefs of Staff".<sup>30</sup> The pivotal position of British planners was explicitly recognized in JP(48)74 on Western Union Defence organization. "We believe that the link between the Western Union Chiefs of Staff on the one hand and the Combined Chiefs of Staff and the machinery for Commonwealth Defence on the other will be provided in peace by a common British membership of all three organisations".<sup>31</sup>

Against this background, the importance of the Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1948 comes clearly into focus. At the same time that the Prime Ministers were conferring in London a third round of planning talks between British and American planners took place in Washington. With the satisfactory results of both of these two meetings the Chiefs of Staff found themselves in the position that they had long hoped for as the brokers of free world strategic planning. Though there were many shoals and rocks in the waters ahead, British planners now

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30. COS(48)66th Mtg, Min 2, 12 May 1948, Ibid.

31. JP(48)74(Final) considered at COS(48)85th Mtg, Min 4, 23 June 1948, DEFE 4/14.



pressed forward under full sails.

On 10 November the Chiefs of Staff discussed the outcome of the planning talks with the Americans with the Directors of Plans. The emergency war plans had been revised with plan Doublequick renamed Speedway and the American version now called Fleetwood. These talks had focused once again on the Middle East. British planners were still striving to convince the Americans of the importance of this theatre.

As General Slim, the new CIGS,<sup>32</sup> pointed out:

The importance of the Middle East to the United Kingdom was such that we should have to secure Egypt and the Canal Zone. This must be made clear to the Americans as it was vital that Anglo/American resources should not be divided and that in the Middle East they should act in general conformity with British strategic policy.<sup>33</sup>

The revised plans did commit both an American fighter group and radar to reach the delta area in Egypt more quickly than previously. The extreme sensitivity of the Americans to admitting a commitment to the Middle East is reflected in the fact that in the American short term strategic concept, the Middle East was not mentioned directly, but only referred to as an "air base". The British planners also announced that they had agreed to the American suggestion that the American Commander-in-Chief, North Atlantic and Mediterranean, Admiral Conolly, should be placed in charge of preparing a combined plan for the defence of the Middle East.<sup>34</sup>

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32. Slim had replaced Montgomery as CIGS on 1 November 1948.

33. COS(48)160th Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/16.

34. JP(48)130(Final), 4 November 1948, DEFE 6/7.

On 22 November the Chiefs of Staff considered the report by the JPS specifically recommending vesting Admiral Conolly with responsibility for peacetime planning in the Mediterranean and the Middle East.<sup>35</sup>

In discussion it was agreed that there need be no publicity for the appointment of Admiral Conolly to direct peace-time planning and that there were substantial advantages in agreeing that there should be a U.S. Supreme Commander in the Middle East in war. These points should be submitted to the Minister of Defence who should be asked to agree to the issue of the directives.

When the Chiefs of Staff had not received formal approval for the appointment of Admiral Conolly by their meeting on 10 December, they noted, "It would be embarrassing if Admiral Conolly reached the Mediterranean before instructions regarding combined planning had reached the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East".<sup>36</sup> This issue was finally resolved at a Staff Conference with Attlee and Bevin on 17 December. Tedder explained that the appointment of Admiral Conolly might serve to bind the Americans more closely to the defence of the Middle East. Both Attlee and Bevin expressed concern for the political implications of such an appointment. Bevin in particular pointed out that, "The Russians had said that they would not interfere with British policy in the Middle East, but if they realised that British and American defence policy in that theatre was linked, then they were likely to react sharply and aggressively". He and Attlee both expressed concern lest the Arabs get word of this combined planning. The Chiefs of Staff assured them that this planning would take place

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35. JP(48)133(Final) considered at COS(48)166th Mtg, Min 5, DEFE 4/18.

36. COS(48)177th Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, Ibid.

in the utmost secrecy. As a result, the conference endorsed the appointment of Admiral Conolly.<sup>37</sup>

The problem of combined planning in the Middle East remained an extremely sensitive subject. Progress in developing combined plans inched along. On 5 January 1949, the Chiefs of Staff learned that the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East were to meet Admiral Conolly in Malta for their first round of planning talks.<sup>38</sup> Such was the sensitivity of the meeting that on 14 January, the Chiefs of Staff gave instructions that if the meeting between Admiral Conolly and the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East was noted by the press, they were to be told that the talks concerned the Mediterranean and not the Middle East.<sup>39</sup>

Following the meetings, Admiral Conolly and the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East recommended bringing American planners into the British planning process in the Middle East. On 21 January the Chiefs of Staff sought the approval of the Minister of Defence and the Foreign Office for American planners to go to Fayid in the Canal Zone.<sup>40</sup> When Bevin seemed reluctant to endorse this step, the Vice Chiefs had Hollis write, "it does not seem logical to show any signs of drawing back from our agreed arrangements for Anglo/American military co-operation in the Middle East at the time

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37. COS(48)182nd Mtg, Ibid.

38. COS(49)2nd Mtg, Min 5, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/19.

39. COS(49)8th Mtg, Min 7, Confidential Annex, Ibid.

40. COS(49)11th Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, Ibid.

when the whole aim and object of our policy is to get more co-operation generally from the Americans in the Middle East".<sup>41</sup>

The ensuing discussions illustrate the difficulties British strategists confronted in trying to reconcile their strategic requirements with both the Egyptians and the Americans. Such three cornered discussions with the British in the middle became the norm over the next year and a half prior to the outbreak of the Korean War as British strategists attempted to preserve Britain's central role in free world global strategic planning. On 31 January the Chiefs of Staff were informed that the Americans were in favour of an American presence at Middle East Headquarters, but wanted their presence and purpose to be kept from the Egyptians. On the other hand, the British Ambassador in Egypt thought that combined planning with the Americans offered an excellent opportunity to court Egyptian favour. Bevin wanted the Chiefs' of Staff opinion. While the Chiefs of Staff worried about the problem of security in any talks with the Egyptians they also saw advantages:

. . . there was much to be said for letting the Russians become aware that the Americans were prepared to co-operate with us in the defence of the Middle East. In any case, discussions were bound to bring home to the Egyptians the fact that Egypt was essential as a base upon which the whole defence of the Middle East would depend.<sup>42</sup>

In a Staff Conference with Alexander on 2 February the Chiefs of Staff produced an aide memoire that clearly laid out the issues involved:

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41. COS(49)12th Mtg, Min 2, Appendix II, 24 January 1949, Ibid.

42. COS(49)15th Mtg, Min 7, Confidential Annex, Ibid.

The Egyptians already know that Anglo-American discussions are taking place. If we try to get American Staff officers into Fayid without the willing consent of the Egyptians, we shall meet with constant obstruction.

Furthermore, the possibility of associating Egypt with the discussions which is likely to flatter the Egyptians into acceptance, provides us with a priceless opportunity which must not be missed of getting the Egyptians to afford us the military facilities in Egypt that are essential to the long term security of the Middle East.

The reluctance of the American military authorities to the association of a third party with planning discussions is notorious. It may take some time to overcome this in the case of Egypt.<sup>43</sup>

The importance which the Chiefs of Staff attached to bringing the Americans and the Egyptians together in the Middle East can be seen as they now started an intensive campaign to influence the Americans towards that end. They prepared a brief for the B.J.S.M. to present to Admiral Conolly when he returned to Washington. They met with Admiral Conolly in person on his return on 21 February. He reported that he had been unable to win the acceptance of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on including the Egyptians. Aside from the security problem, he cited political problems between Egypt and Israel and the fear of setting the precedent that countries in which America desired strategic facilities would have to be included in allied strategic planning.<sup>44</sup> On 7 March the Chiefs of Staff met with General Vandenburg, the Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force, and again discussed planning in the Middle East. General Norstad speaking for the Americans said, "It was thought that the British already had

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43. COS(49)17th Mtg, Min 2, Appendix, Ibid.

44. COS(49)30th Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/20.

all the facilities in Egypt which they required". To which Tedder replied:

. . . that unfortunately our minimum strategic facilities in Egypt were by no means assured and, whether we liked it or not, some degree of collaboration with the Egyptians could not be avoided. If we could associate Egypt in some way with the discussions, we might be able to convince them of the necessity for the strategic facilities we required and come to some permanent arrangement with them.<sup>45</sup>

The Americans seemed to be impressed with the British case, but after a period of deliberation they still refused to participate. The Chiefs of Staff learned on 31 May that this was the case and decided to abandon any further efforts at joint talks including both the Americans and the Egyptians.<sup>46</sup>

The security issue that had cropped up in British planners attempts to co-ordinate their policy towards Egypt with the United States, was only a microcosm of a much larger problem. British strategists could only broker western global strategic planning if they could discuss their own plans with others. The problem was that it was transparently obvious that British plans rested on American support. What degree of American support Britain expected was thus a most pertinent question, particularly for her Commonwealth allies. Furthermore, the Americans were extremely tight lipped about all types of military information with the result that all forms of planning with them from technical to strategic were extremely difficult. The Chiefs of Staff squarely addressed this problem at their meeting on 9

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45. COS(49)38th Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, Ibid.

46. COS(49)80th Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/22.

December 1948 with Mr. Saltzman, Chairman of the United States State-Army-Navy-Air Co-ordinating Committee. Even technical details were extremely important. What if British planes were designed that could not carry American bombs? The Royal Navy was already experiencing difficulty in planning joint exercises with its Western European allies as the Royal Navy code books contained American information. Australian scientists would have to be removed from all guided missile research if the United Kingdom was to strictly adhere to its agreements with the Americans. Saltzman recommended that the British Chiefs of Staff make a direct approach to the U.S. government laying out the problem in just such concrete terms.<sup>47</sup>

This problem continued to defy solution for more than a year after this meeting, though. On 22 December in discussing the disclosure of military information to Commonwealth countries, the Chiefs of Staff agreed to seek the approval of the Defence Committee for the proposals Slim had put forward in their discussions with Saltzman. These proposals entailed categorizing classified material according to whether it could be disseminated to third parties at the discretion of either government, disseminated to third parties only with prior approval of the originating government or, for the most sensitive material, must not be disseminated under any circumstances.<sup>48</sup> The issue was not subsequently brought before the Defence Committee, however. On 18 February, "Exchange of Defence Information with the U.S.A." was the sole topic of the second Chiefs

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47. COS(48)176th Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/18.

48. COS(48)184th Mtg, Min 7, Ibid.

of Staff meeting on that day, but the entire record has been withheld including the attendance.<sup>49</sup> In May some progress was made when the Chiefs of Staff learned that Louis Johnson, the new American Secretary of Defence, had agreed to the British proposal to have discussions on this issue, but ultimate solution was still in the future.<sup>50</sup>

Against the background set by the 1948 Prime Ministers' Meeting for increased co-operation from the dominions and the continuing if difficult increase in co-operation with the United States, the Chiefs of Staff tried to draft a suitable strategy around which to secure their own influence. The heating up of the cold war in 1948 along with Montgomery's pursuit of a continental commitment had called into question the validity of DO(47)44. British strategists perceived short term plans such as Doublequick and Speedway primarily as stopgap measures to offer a limited means of insurance until more solidly based long term plans could be brought into effect. As a result of the April 1948 planning talks with the Americans, the JPS had produced a paper titled "Long Term Planning".<sup>51</sup> U.S. and British planners had agreed that long term planning should be aimed at being prepared to fight a major war by 1957. This date had been selected because it was deemed to be the earliest possible date by which the Soviet Union could have built up a sufficient stock of nuclear weapons to risk going to war. On 5 May 1948 when the Chiefs of Staff considered this report, they instructed the JPS to prepare a series of reports dealing

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49. COS(49)29th Mtg, DEFE 4/20.

50. COS(49)67th Mtg, Min 8, 9 May 1949; DEFE 4/21.

51. JP(48)50(Final), 30 April 1948, DEFE 6/6.



with the possibility of war in 1957. These reports included an "Overall Strategic Concept for War in 1957"<sup>52</sup> as well as "Defence of the Middle East",<sup>53</sup> "Defence of Western Europe in 1957",<sup>54</sup> and "Control of Sea Communications - Long Term Planning".<sup>55</sup> An additional report of "Far East Strategy and Defence Policy" was requested in September.<sup>56</sup> The Chiefs of Staff had intended that these reports should be completed prior to the next round of planning talks with the Americans scheduled for October. Only the reports on overall strategy, Western Europe and the Middle East, however, were completed before these discussions.

The Chiefs of Staff discussed the report on overall strategy on both 22 and 29 September, but the minutes of these discussions as well as the report have been withheld.<sup>57</sup> The report was based on DO(47)44, COS(48)58(0) and JP(48)11 as well as JIC reports on "The World Situation in 1957" and "Russian Strategic Intentions".<sup>58</sup> That it was

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52. JP(48)59, withheld, DEFE 6/6. The second revised version of this report dated 20 July 1949 is available in DEFE 4/22 annexed to COS(49)97th Mtg, Min 3 and will be discussed subsequently. The slip in DEFE 6/6 stating that the report has been retained gives the date of the second revise as 20 July 1948 and is in error.

53. JP(48)61, withheld, DEFE 6/6.

54. JP(48)64, withheld, DEFE 6/6.

55. JP(48)65, DEFE 6/6.

56. JP(48)101, DEFE 6/6.

57. JP(48)59 considered at both COS(48)134th Mtg, Min 3 and COS(48)139th Mtg, Min 4, all withheld DEFE 4/16.

58. JP(48)59 terms of reference, 20 May 1948, DEFE 6/6. For DO(47)44 see pp. 122-25 above. For COS(48)58(0) see p. 143 above. JP(48)11, withheld, DEFE 6/5. The JIC reports are JIC(47)42(0) and JIC(48)9 respectively. All JIC reports have been withheld from the Ministry of Defence records in the Public Record Office.

approved can be gleaned from the planning teams report of their discussions in America:

A paper on the long term strategic concept was agreed with the Americans which, though founded on different premises to J.P. (48) 59 - "Overall Strategic Concept for War in 1957" - is substantially in line with it. . . . We were unable to go further than this with long term planning, as the Americans were not ready.<sup>59</sup>

The planning teams report also commented on the differences between the British and American approaches to long term planning:

The main difference between the U.S. and British concepts is that the Americans approach the problem of war in 1957 from the point of view of what it is desirable to do, whereas the British paper considers the minimum which must be done. The British paper deals with both military and political factors in the concept of war, with supporting arguments, whereas the American paper is confined purely to assumptions and statements without arguments.

This statement is a tactful way of saying that from the British point of view the Americans were building castles in the air while British planners were striving to reach a viable strategy. Two factors that favoured more realistic British planning were the realization of their own weakness and the close relations between the military planners and the Foreign Office. Limited resources haunted every step in the evolution of Britain postwar's strategy. The need for greater Commonwealth unity, for development and integration of the colonial empire and above all the need to collaborate with the Americans all reflected physical weakness. Priorities had to be carefully set to insure the maximum impact for any given effort. The initial debate over the Middle East and the on-going debate over a commitment to

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59. JP(48)130(Final) considered at COS(48)160th Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, 10 November 1948, DEFE 4/17.

Western Europe both centred on the question of Britain's ability to shoulder these commitments with reduced resources. Coupled with the realism induced by a paucity of resources, the continuous dialogue between the Foreign Office first at the Joint Planning Staff level and then with the Chiefs of Staff gave British strategy a broad base and insured that military needs were not laid out in a political vacuum. These differences in the formulation of strategy would continue to be apparent in Anglo/American combined planning.<sup>60</sup>

Even with these comparative advantages over their American counterparts, long range planning still proved to be an uncharted minefield for British strategists. Even the close co-ordination between the Chiefs' of Staff machinery and the Foreign Office did not prevent British long range planning being overcome by events in the rapidly changing cold war environment. When the Chiefs of Staff discussed the JPS report on future strategy in the Far East, after it had been months in preparation, they referred it back to the JPS to take into account the recent success of the Communist Chinese that made it probable that all of China would shortly be under Communist control.<sup>61</sup> Thus a report on strategy in 1957 faced becoming obsolescent before the middle of 1949.

Nor were British long term plans exempt from the very charges that they made against American plans of being unrealistic. On 13

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60. For American planning problems at this time see Thomas H. Etzold and John L. Gaddis, ed., Containment: Documents on American Policy and Strategy, 1945 - 1950, (New York, 1978), pp. 21-3 and 279.

61. JP(48)101(Final) considered at COS(49)13th Mtg, Min 6, 27 January 1949, DEFE 4/19.

April 1949 when the Chiefs of Staff considered the report "Control of Sea Communications - Long Term Planning", "LORD TEDDER said that he was most doubtful whether the report would serve any useful purpose, as the forces shown in the appendices to the paper as necessary for controlling our sea communications, were far beyond what could be provided".<sup>62</sup> He was concerned that the report might undermine British attempts to have the Americans formulate strategic plans on a sound basis. On 27 April he agreed to approving the report on the condition that the appendices showing the unrealistic figures were removed.<sup>63</sup>

By the time of these deliberations on long term strategy in April 1949, however, the signing of the North Atlantic Treaty on 4 April meant that immediate regional issues were again pushing long term strategic decisions into the background. In fact, planning for the defence of Western Europe had become a consistent intrusion into planning for Commonwealth defence since early 1948. The Monday after the close of the Prime Ministers' Meeting in October and while the U.S. and British planners were still meeting in Washington, the Chiefs of Staff met to prepare for the third meeting of the Western Union Chiefs of Staff Committee. Both the VCIGS and the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff opened the meeting by condemning too close a co-operation with Britain's Western European allies. Air Vice Marshal Hudleston, the British representative to the Western Union military committee:

. . . pointed out that the present task of the Military Committee was to prepare a statement of forces and equipment which could be given to the U.S. Government as

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62. JP(48)65(Final) considered at COS(49)55th Mtg, Min 6, DEFE 4/21.

63. COS(49)62nd Mtg, Min 8; Ibid.

an indication of the defence requirements and deficiencies of the Western Union. For this purpose it would be essential to show the overall picture. The Americans would certainly not be convinced by any statement which merely comprised a list of those forces and resources which the Western Powers stated they were willing to make available for the defence of Western Europe.<sup>64</sup>

Tedder, while acknowledging the difficulties of planning with the other Western Union Chiefs of Staff, generally supported Hudleston's position for greater co-operation. He summed up:

Indeed, it was to our advantage that they [Western Union Chiefs of Staff Committee] should consider the different commitments outside Western Europe, for otherwise we had no means of making France and Holland call back some of the large forces which at present were wastefully employed in French North Africa, Indo China and Indonesia, for the task of defending the Rhine. Although we might ultimately have to accept some measure of direction from the Western Union Chiefs of Staff, Lord Tedder thought that our influence was such that we ought to be able to lead rather than to be led.

Tedder agreed that at the meeting of the Western Union Chiefs of Staff the following day he would propose concentrating on insuring that the forces already available were fit to fight.

Despite their reluctance to become too involved in Western Europe, the Chiefs of Staff had begun to shift their position and were now more willing than their political masters to consider greater commitments to Western Europe. When the Defence Committee considered a proposal by Montgomery that Britain should provide an additional brigade for the defence of Western Europe on the outbreak of war, the Chiefs of Staff were cautiously supportive. Nevertheless, the committee opposed the proposal.<sup>65</sup> A real shift in the Chiefs' of

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64. COS(48)151st Mtg, 25 October 1948, DEFE 4/17.

65. DO(49)2nd Mtg, Min 4, 10 January 1949, CAB 131/8.

Staff attitudes towards Western Europe is discernible at their meeting of 20 April 1949. Slim, with his low-keyed style, seems to have been more effective than Montgomery had been in winning the support of his colleagues for a greater British commitment to Europe. He argued:

Although on purely military grounds there was much to be said for keeping the British land forces' contribution to the defence of Western Europe as small as possible in order that we might make the maximum contribution to the defence of the Middle East, there were serious political objections to such a proceeding.<sup>66</sup>

Slim argued that Britain would eventually have to augment her land forces committed to Western Europe to maintain British influence within Western Union. He recognized that this could not be done without committing additional air forces. To this end, Slim won the approval of his colleagues to prepare a study on the impact of a greater continental commitment.

The Chiefs of Staff considered the resulting study on 20 May. At this meeting Slim argued that the choice rested between making a firm commitment to the defence of Western Europe or concentrating on the cold war and agreeing to commit only "left over" resources to strengthen the defence of Europe. Tedder weighed into the argument by saying:

. . . he did not think that it was possible to avoid the real issue which was to decide whether or not we were prepared to make a major contribution on land to the defence of Western Europe. Any undertaking into which we might enter to send further forces to the Continent would inevitably have repercussions on our ability to carry out other essential tasks in other parts of the world. The Western Union nations showed a marked lack of appreciation of the value to the common cause of operations in the Middle East. . . . The British forces in the Middle East

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66. COS(49)57th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/21.

would be making as [sic] essential contribution to the war effort as a whole. . . . he was concerned that nothing should be done to prejudice our agreed strategy, namely that we must ensure the safety of the United Kingdom, the Middle East and essential sea communications.<sup>67</sup>

After the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, Sir John Edelsten, spoke in support of Tedder's view, Slim came back with a new approach:

Our contribution should therefore be based on the availability of territorial army divisions. It should be assumed that out of the first four territorial divisions to be mobilised, two divisions would go to the Middle East and two to Western Europe.

As a result of this proposal, the Chiefs of Staff agreed to request a new study on this basis. Time was critical as the Western Union Defence Committee would be addressing this issue in early July and it would be necessary to get ministerial approval on the size of the British contribution.

The Chiefs of Staff finalized their proposal for ministers on the issue of supplying additional forces for the defence of Western Europe at their meetings on 10 and 16 June. On 10 June Templer and Fraser opened saying that they believed that from a political point of view it was essential to make a firm British commitment to send additional forces to the continent in the event of war. Tedder countered effectively saying, "It would be quite wrong for the Chiefs of Staff because of political considerations, to tender advice to Ministers which they believed to be unsound on military grounds." He concluded "that the right policy was to concentrate on fulfilling the essential tasks of our approved strategy". With this line of argument he seems to have swung Templer to his side. Templer said that even with

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67. COS(49)75th Mtg, Min 1, Ibid.

with Commonwealth assistance the forces for the defence of the Middle East were barely adequate. He added that, "If Ministers ruled that Western Europe was to have priority the defence of the Middle East would undoubtedly be prejudiced". They agreed to once more have the report redrafted so that the implications of sending additional troops to the continent was clearly spelled out for ministers.<sup>68</sup> The situation on 16 June was much the same as before. Slim and Fraser placed greater emphasis on the political threat to the Western Union if Britain was seen not to be whole-heartedly in support of defending her continental allies, while Tedder continued to see the Middle East as vital for overall strategy. He was, however, willing to concede that, if ministers determined that politically it was essential for Britain to make a continental commitment, he would be willing to support it. Thus the Chiefs of Staff concluded almost two months of debate by deciding to place the hot potato of a continental commitment in the hands of ministers.<sup>69</sup>

The Defence Committee had little difficulty in arriving at a decision, though. After Tedder had explained the differences which he and his colleagues had over this issue, Bevin weighed in strongly with the opinion that whether or not Britain committed two divisions or not to the defence of Western Europe would have little overall impact on the stability of the Western Union. He said that other European Foreign Ministers were far more concerned about the nature and size of the American commitment. Attlee then briskly summed up:

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68. COS(49)86th Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/22.

69. COS(49)88th Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, Ibid.



. . . that at the next meeting of the Western Union Chiefs of Staff the British representative should accordingly make it clear that, while we were in no sense faltering in our intention to contribute to the defence of Western Union and, indeed, were resolutely determined to carry our full share of the burden, we were not prepared to enter any undertaking at this time to provide specific forces at specific dates. . . . In the absence of any knowledge of American intentions the United Kingdom view was that it was premature to attempt to assess the contribution which the country could make to the defence of Western Europe in 1951.<sup>70</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff wrapped the issue up for the time being at their meeting the following day by placing the issue on the agenda for their upcoming meeting with the U.S. Chiefs of Staff. "It had therefore been agreed that the question of the U.K. contribution to the defence of Western Europe ought, in the first instance, to be discussed fully between the British and United States Chiefs of Staff in the context of the overall plan for war". The JPS were instructed accordingly to prepare a paper for the Chiefs of Staff to use at their forthcoming meeting.<sup>71</sup>

#### Commonwealth Co-operation: Dominions Join the Parade

The debate over a continental commitment once again highlighted the central role played by the United States in British defence planning. British strategists had to navigate carefully to keep their course from diverging too far from that of the Americans. The goal was a parallel course, though, not a mere following in the wake. British planners hoped that with the Commonwealth engines finely tuned they

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70. DO(49)16th Mtg, Min 1, 21 June 1949, CAB 131/8.

71. COS(49)92nd Mtg, Min 7, DEFE 4/22.

could maintain speed with the Americans and then by adept signalling might succeed in making adjustments in the American course that would allow them to continue to make for their own desired destination. The Prime Ministers' Meeting of the previous October had seemed to open the way to bring the Commonwealth more fully into the British global framework. The 1946 meeting had also ended on a positive note, though, only to subsequently fall on barren ground. Happily for British strategists the ground proved to be more fertile in the months following the meeting in 1948.

When the Chiefs of Staff considered the results of the Prime Ministers' Meeting on 3 November, they agreed to give the Commonwealth liaison system another chance in light of the new atmosphere that seemed to have arisen from the meeting. They also instructed the JPS to consider ways in which to incorporate South Africa, Australia and New Zealand into planning for defence of the Middle East. Although the Prime Minister of Pakistan had made strong statements in favour of Commonwealth defence, in view of the criticism of his stance in some quarters in Pakistan, they considered it prudent not to institute closer defence co-operation with Pakistan for the time being.<sup>72</sup>

As a result of this meeting the JPS took it upon themselves to prepare a report for the Chiefs of Staff on "Procedure for Consultation on Commonwealth Military Planning". The report stated that the most pressing problem was to include the Commonwealth countries in short term emergency planning. The key to success would be to adopt the proper approach and the JPS recommended that this

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72. COS(48)155th Mtg, Min 7, DEFE 4/17.

approach should be on an individual and regional basis rather than on an overall Commonwealth basis. From the JPS point of view Canada had already been taken care of as Canadian planners had already taken part in the most recent planning discussions with the Americans. Canadian resources could all be effectively absorbed in the North Atlantic region. India and Pakistan were not at the present moment capable of supplying forces outside of South Asia and so therefore, discussions with them were not urgent. Current defence discussions in progress with Ceylon covered all that was needed militarily. "The immediate need, therefore, is discussions with Australia, New Zealand and South Africa". To pursue this end the JPS recommended meetings between planners of the various governments as had already worked with great success with the Americans and Canadians. On the issue of where these meetings should take place the JPS recommended that, although it was inefficient, the most politically acceptable approach to the other members of the Commonwealth would be for British planners to go to them. In conclusion, the planners suggested that they should prepare to go to Australia and New Zealand in the near future and to South Africa whenever the South Africans appeared ready.<sup>73</sup> The Vice Chiefs of Staff approved this report on 20 December.<sup>74</sup> On 27 January the Chiefs of Staff were informed that the Minister of Defence had also approved of this policy.<sup>75</sup>

On 28 January, the Vice Chiefs of Staff met with Mr. Antrobus of

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73. JP(48)121(Final), 16 December 1948, DEFE 6/7.

74. COS(48)183rd Mtg, Min 4, DEFE 4/18.

75. COS(49)13th Mtg, Min 10, DEFE 4/19.

the Commonwealth Relations Office to discuss another JPS report "Defence Appreciation as a Basis for Military Planning between Commonwealth Staffs". This defence appreciation covered much the same ground as DO(47)44 and went into greater detail than PMM(48)1 prepared for the Prime Ministers' Meeting. It again emphasized the Soviet threat and the importance of the Middle East as an air base from which to deter, or if necessary strike, the Soviet Union. The Commonwealth Relations Office had raised objections to this report being disseminated to dominion governments. When the Vice Chiefs' challenged the Commonwealth Relations Office's position, "MR. ANTROBUS said that if the Commonwealth Relations Office appeared to be very cautious in this matter, it was because of their experience that much harm might be done by assuming prematurely the agreement of Commonwealth Governments". After discussion it was agreed that the report would be given to the liaison staffs of Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The report would be withheld from South Africa until that government requested such as appraisal or the United Kingdom's High Commissioner recommended that the paper would be useful to him. The Vice Chiefs also took exception to a letter submitted by the Commonwealth Relations Office for Attlee to send to the Australian Prime Minister because it did not stress the need for planning discussions at an early date. Antrobus agreed that this point should be rectified.<sup>76</sup> In this meeting the Chiefs of Staff had taken a significant step in moving defence discussions within the Commonwealth forward. As in the discussions on the issue of keeping India in the

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76. JP(48)117(Final) considered at COS(49)14th Mtg, Min 1, Ibid. Subsequently this report was circulated as COS(49)49.

Commonwealth in 1946 and 1947, and in the call for the 1948 Prime Ministers Meeting, the Chiefs of Staff again were playing a leading role in Whitehall in formulating Commonwealth policy.

The outline for pushing Commonwealth defence forward now took shape. Individual discussions would be held with each of the dominions. Australia and New Zealand would be approached both individually and together. Canada would be incorporated into the Anglo/American relationship. South Africa would be approached based on the advice of Sir Evelyn Baring, the United Kingdom's High Commissioner in South Africa. The new South Asian dominions would be handled separately and with less urgency.

Australia was the first country to respond favourably to the plans outlined at the Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1948 for greater co-operation on defence within the Commonwealth. Even before the end of the Prime Ministers' meeting, however, the Chiefs of Staff ran into considerable resistance in Whitehall to their plans for closer co-operation with the Australians in defence. The issue was the Chiefs' of Staff desire to have Australia assume responsibility for strategic planning in South East Asia and the South West Pacific, an area including Malaya, Indonesia, Australia and New Zealand. Mr. Denning of the Foreign Office objected saying that the Foreign Office could not agree to a dominion being responsible for the defence of a foreign country's territory, Indonesia in this case, without consulting that country. He also said that poor security in Australia made it likely that Australian planning would not remain secret. The first argument seems fatuous. Had not Britain and France made plans for the defence of Belgium before World War II without consultation

with the Belgians? The second argument might make a little more sense, but then how was the Foreign Office to expect the Chiefs of Staff to co-operate with countries such as Egypt? Both Dening and Mr. Paskin of the Colonial Office argued that any knowledge that Britain had allotted planning for this region would be fatal to British prestige there. As Dening put it, ". . . United Kingdom influence would be finally extinguished". Sir Harold Parker of the Ministry of Defence countered:

. . . it was unrealistic for Civil Departments to expect the United Kingdom to meet from its own resources all the defence commitments that might arise throughout the world. Considerable efforts had been made throughout the years after the war to obtain increased defence contributions from Commonwealth countries. It would seem illogical at the time when Commonwealth Governments were considering how best they could assist us, to limit them to the purely local defence of their own territories.

Hollis added that agreements reached only the day before at the Prime Ministers' Meeting made regional planning with the Australians a certainty. The JPS was therefore instructed to prepare a letter for the Australian Prime Minister in consultation with the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office with a cover letter for Ministers indicating the issues on which there was interdepartmental disagreement.<sup>77</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff approved the JPS report that followed on 8 November and forwarded it to the Minister of Defence for his approval and submission to the Defence Committee.<sup>78</sup> The forwarding of this report led to a Staff Conference with Alexander on 12 November at

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77. COS(48)150th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/17.

78. JP(48)114(Final), considered at COS(48)158th Mtg, Min 3, Ibid.

which the Chiefs of Staff had to do battle with their own minister over this issue. After convincing Alexander that the report was for planning purposes only and reflected no diminution of British authority over her own colonies and that it was essential to convince the Australians that their own area of regional responsibility could be adequately defended and forces left over for them to aid in the defence of the Middle East, the report again went forward.<sup>79</sup>

When the issue finally came before the Defence Committee on 24 November, one would never sense the row that had gone on behind the scenes in Whitehall as the Chiefs of Staff had pushed this issue forward. The discussion in the Defence Committee reflected regret that Australia was willing to undertake defence planning in the Southwest Pacific and little more. "THE PRIME MINISTER said that he regarded the Chiefs of Staff proposals as a modest step forward in the sphere of Commonwealth Defence collaboration for which it was to be hoped greater things might later be expected".<sup>80</sup> Once again the alliance between Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff had been essential to push forward Commonwealth defence plans against the resistance of other government departments.

On 16 December the Chiefs of Staff approved the draft reply to be sent from Attlee to the Australian Prime Minister.<sup>81</sup> Attlee despatched the letter on 29 December. After an exchange of letters between Attlee

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79. COS(48)162nd Mtg, Min 2, Ibid.

80. DO(48)22nd Mtg, Min 2, CAB 131/5.

81. COS(48)180th Mtg, Min 14, DEFE 4/18.

and Chifley, it was agreed that joint planning would commence when the Australians said that they were ready.<sup>82</sup>

Prior to the departure of the joint planning team for Australia, Sir Frederick Shedden, the Australian Secretary of the Department of Defence, arrived in London for a visit of several months. On 2 June he attended a meeting of the Chiefs of Staff. In discussing the purpose of his visit he said:

He thought it would be an advantage if he had discussions with the Joint Planning Staff before their visit to Australia. It was most important that, when considering the contribution that Australia might make to Commonwealth defence, full account should be taken of the political considerations involved. . . . There was now in Australia a new awareness of the importance of helping the United Kingdom shoulder the burden of Commonwealth defence. The whole question required the most careful handling in order that the ground gained should not be lost.

Further he said, "It was therefore important to the achievement of co-operation in British Commonwealth defence to concentrate on making fully effective the machinery which had been adopted following the conclusions reached at the Prime Ministers' Conference in 1946".<sup>83</sup> Slowly but surely, the Chiefs of Staff campaign for greater dominion co-operation in postwar Commonwealth defence appeared to be bearing fruit.

Plans for defence co-operation with New Zealand had meanwhile been moving in tandem with those for defence co-operation with the Australians. At the Prime Ministers' Meeting in 1948 the New Zealand

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82. JP(49)20(Final), 18 March 1949, DEFE 6/8.

83. COS(49)83rd Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/22.



Prime Minister had continued to be a paragon of Commonwealth loyalty. Indeed it would appear that his desire to aid Britain in Commonwealth defence exceeded even the bounds of feasibility. At a meeting with Alexander, Fraser had offered to produce three divisions as New Zealand's contribution to Commonwealth land forces. The Chiefs of Staff doubted whether New Zealand was capable of raising even one division in peacetime without conscription. Nevertheless, the Chiefs of Staff could not but be heartened at the co-operative New Zealand attitude and instructed the JPS to prepare a report on defence issues for the New Zealand Prime Minister.<sup>84</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff considered the resulting JPS report on 8 November. This report was strongly couched in cold war terms addressing the universal threat of world communism and reiterating the Commonwealth strategy espoused in PMM(48)1. It called for New Zealand to prepare an expeditionary force for use in the defence of the Middle East. "We consider . . . that New Zealand forces available for Commonwealth defence can be most usefully employed in the defence of the Middle East". The Chiefs of Staff strongly endorsed this report.<sup>85</sup>

After the Prime Ministers' Meeting, the New Zealand Prime Minister had gone to a meeting of the United Nations, planning to return to Britain for talks on his way home in early December. In preparation for these talks the Chiefs of Staff had approved both the

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84. COS(48)150th Mtg, Min 4, 22 October 1948, DEFE 4/17.

85. JP(48)115 considered at COS(48)158th Mtg, Min 6; Ibid.

paper discussed above and a paper on National Service as applied to New Zealand. On 15 December the Chiefs of Staff held a Staff Conference with Alexander and Fraser. Fraser again showed his strong support for Commonwealth defence:

It was not, therefore, only the defence of New Zealand itself which must be their first concern, but the question as to whether if war broke out communism would be defeated. New Zealand would devote the maximum possible contribution to the common Allied effort against Communism. If that failed New Zealand would be isolated and could be overcome comparatively easily.

The Chiefs of Staff emphasized that New Zealand's air and land forces would be wanted in the Middle East within the first months after the outbreak of war and that in order for New Zealand to create the level of forces envisioned some form of National Service would have to be instituted. At the conclusion of the meeting Fraser affirmed his government's commitment to joint planning. "So far as New Zealand was concerned there was complete authority for United Kingdom and New Zealand representatives to meet and to talk on whatever subjects they chose".<sup>86</sup>

With this response from the New Zealand Prime Minister, with the early acceptance by the Australian government of the call for greater Commonwealth defence co-operation and with the Canadians actively involved in Anglo/American planning, the Chiefs' of Staff frustration at the feet dragging of other Whitehall departments is understandable. Far from being the military, who are so often accused of mental rigidity and an inability to move with the times, it appears to have been the civil departments that were unable to break out of an

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86. COS(48)179th Mtg, DEFE 4/18.

ossified view of the possibilities of Commonwealth co-operation.

The only difficulty between British strategists and the New Zealand authorities during this period arose from Britain's inability to divulge the level of American support for Britain's global plans. On 22 April the Chiefs of Staff considered a report by the JPS addressing specific questions from the New Zealand Prime Minister on defence. The JPS clearly laid out the problem:

Mr. Fraser would also welcome any information that can be provided concerning the prospect of United States military assistance in the Middle East.

Plan SPEEDWAY contains details of the planned American contribution in the short term, and long term planning for this theatre is at present in progress between the British and Americans. Present security arrangements with the Americans, however, do not permit such information to be divulged to other countries.<sup>87</sup>

The report suggested that only a general assurance of American co-operation could be given and this suggestion was approved by the Chiefs of Staff.

On 8 June the New Zealand Chief of the General Staff and Chief of the Air Staff attended a Chiefs' of Staff meeting and asked much the same questions as those raised by Fraser concerning the Middle East.<sup>88</sup> Defence issues had assumed a particularly high profile in New Zealand at the time as a referendum on National Service was to be held in July. Before the New Zealand Chief of the General Staff departed he passed on a request from Fraser that Attlee make a formal request for

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87. JP(49)41(Final), considered at COS(49)58th Mtg, Min 3, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/21.

88. COS(49)84th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 2/22.

New Zealand's assistance in the defence of the Middle East. The Chiefs of Staff had no objection to their plans for New Zealand's assistance in the Middle East being made public and forwarded this request.<sup>89</sup>

Although Australia had approved the idea of a future visit by a joint planning team in February and the New Zealand Prime Minister had made a formal request for such a visit in March, the Chiefs of Staff hoped that these two visits could be linked together and hence ironing out the details took time. In a report on 18 May, the JPS put forward a six to eight week time-table for the proposed visits with the team leaving at the end of June. Brokering Commonwealth defence was a complex scheduling exercise. As the JPS pointed out:

As the Americans have so far been unable to give their views on the date and location of the next meeting of American/British/Canadian Planners and as we have represented to the Australians and New Zealanders the necessity for early planning talks, we consider that we should now accept the Australian and New Zealand dates, and defer the next meeting with the United States Planners until the autumn.<sup>90</sup>

On 20 June, however, the Vice Chiefs of Staff approved a three week delay in the departure of the team at the request of the New Zealand government. That government felt the arrival of the team immediately before the referendum on national service might be politically embarrassing.<sup>91</sup> Thus at the end of June the planning team visit to Australia and New Zealand had been fully co-ordinated and was shortly to depart.

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89. COS(49)87th Mtg, Min 10, 13 June 1949, Ibid.

90. JP(49)51(Final), DEFE 6/9.

91. JP(49)68(Final) considered at COS(49)91st Mtg, Min 12, DEFE 4/22.

In the meantime a joint planning team had already visited South Africa. It will be recalled that the Commonwealth Relations Office after trying to block the JPS report "Defence Appreciation as a Basis for Military Planning between Commonwealth Staff" in January had settled for withholding the report solely from South Africa. Their caution towards South Africa was not unjustified. Prior to the Prime Ministers' Meeting in October the Nationalist Government in South Africa had turned down the vacancies offered to it for the IDC course in 1949. It appeared that relations with the Nationalist Government would be none too warm. Nevertheless, this decision had been reversed during the course of the Prime Ministers' Meeting and the anti-communist cast of the deliberations seemed to curry the South African government's favour.

On 7 January 1949 the United Kingdom's High Commissioner, Sir Evelyn Baring, attended a Chiefs of Staff meeting to give them his cautiously optimistic appraisal of the possibilities of defence planning with the Nationalist Government.<sup>92</sup> His own estimation was that staff talks could probably not take place before the autumn, but in this he also proved to be too pessimistic. As the result of a favourable reply from the South African government, the Chiefs of Staff instructed the JPS to prepare a report on regional defence in Africa.<sup>93</sup> This report was eventually forwarded to the British High

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92. COS(49)3rd Mtg, Min 10, DEFE 4/19.

93. COS(49)25th Mtg, Min 7, 14 February 1949, Ibid.

Commissioner in South Africa and approved in the light of his comments.<sup>94</sup> In the meantime, the South African government had requested that the planning team be sent as soon as possible, and the JPS had proposed that this might be possible during the first three weeks in May.<sup>95</sup>

On 10 June the Vice Chiefs of Staff considered the report by the joint planning team on their visit to South Africa. While the report has been withheld, from the Vice Chiefs' comments two problems that confronted the British planners are obvious. The first one is the familiar handicap of not being able to reveal the level of U.S. commitment to the Middle East. Another problem that was to loom increasing large in British strategic calculations was Britain's inability to meet the supply problems of other Commonwealth countries and her allies. The Vice Chiefs commented on this problem:

It had cropped up in South Africa and had been raised on two occasions recently by New Zealand. It was certain also to arise during the Planning talks in Australia. It was in fact becoming clear that the size and timing of the contribution of these three countries would depend to a great extent on what arrangements we could make to help in providing their forces with modern equipment.<sup>96</sup>

In spite of these problems, British strategists had considerable room to be pleased with the level of co-operation that had developed between Britain and the old dominions in the eight months following

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94. JP(49)18(Final Revise), approved at COS(49)60th Mtg, Min 1, 25 April 1949, DEFE 4/21.

95. JP(49)34(Final), 8 April 1949, DEFE 6/8.

96. JP(49)60(Final), withheld, considered at COS(49)85th Mtg, Min 11, DEFE 4/22. JP(49)60 is also withheld in DEFE 6/9.

the Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1948. A joint planning team had visited South Africa, another was poised to depart for Australia and New Zealand and Canadian planners had been incorporated into Anglo/American planning. This level of military co-operation in peacetime with the dominions was without precedent. Coupled with the ongoing planning with the United States, Commonwealth defence with respect to the old dominions seemed finally to have taken off.

#### The Colonial Contribution

In addition, the integration of the colonial empire into Commonwealth defence had also gathered increased momentum during this same period. In the case of the colonial empire the stimulus came from another ad hoc ministerial meeting, GEN 264, held on 10 December 1948.

The genesis of this meeting can be traced all the way back to the discussions on the level of colonial forces that had been stimulated by Attlee in January 1946. It will be recalled that Attlee's initiative had led to the reconstitution of the Overseas Defence Committee. That committee had in turn produced DO(47)37, "The Role of the Colonies in War", which had been approved by the Defence Committee in May 1947. Since that time progress on the issue of raising and funding colonial forces had been moving exceedingly slowly. The heating up of the cold war in the summer of 1948, however, seems to have had a salutary effect in stimulating the Colonial Office to take a greater interest in colonial defence and its relationship to Commonwealth defence. On 22 November 1948 the Chiefs of Staff

considered a report by Creech Jones on financing colonial defence.<sup>97</sup> In this memorandum, Creech Jones took a new approach to the problem of raising colonial forces. He argued, as would have been appropriate to effectively rebut Montgomery's arguments of a year before, that greater financial resources were necessary for the colonies to make their full contribution to Commonwealth defence and that this money should be provided in the form of a Colonial Defence Vote to be administered by the Colonial Office. While disagreeing with Creech Jones's proposals for funding, the thrust of the Chiefs' of Staff recommendations to the Minister of Defence on this report was the urgent need for progress on this issue. "Plans now in hand for Colonial forces in 1949/50 should not be held up by lack of a decision as to who should pay". The Chiefs of Staff noted that the replies of all Colonial governments to DO(47)37 had still not been received a year and a half after this document had been approved by the Defence Committee. They urged that this process should be speeded up. Where the response of the Colonial Governments was unsatisfactory it might be possible to send a minister or hold a conference "to put across the wider policy of Commonwealth Defence and the dangers facing us to-day, in order to induce them to take a more flexible view of their defence responsibilities and commitments".<sup>98</sup>

When Attlee convened GEN 264, "Financing Colonial Defence", three papers were on the table. The first by the Minister of Defence contained Creech Jones's original paper with comments by both the

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97. COS(48)161, DEFE 5/8.

98. COS(48)166th Mtg, Min 3, Annex I, DEFE 4/18.



Chiefs of Staff and the Minister of Defence; the second was a memorandum by the War Office and the third was a reply by Creech Jones to the criticisms of the Chiefs of Staff and the Minister of Defence. The meeting did little more than again paper over the issue of who was to pay for raising colonial forces. Creech Jones's idea of a Colonial Defence Vote was vetoed. The committee decided that forces for internal security should be paid for by the colonial governments and where they possessed insufficient revenues the remainder should be paid by United Kingdom funds under the Colonial and Middle Eastern Services Estimate. Forces required for Commonwealth defence in excess of those for internal security should be paid for in the United Kingdom Defence Votes. In essence this was a non-decision as the crux of the issue was how to determine the level of forces required strictly for internal defence. When the ministers discussed the nature of the forces required for internal security, Attlee proposed a three tiered system consisting of local police forces, regional mobile reserves and United Kingdom armed forces as a back up. Along these lines, the meeting recommended that the Minister of Defence in consultation with the Secretary of State for Colonies should "consider the form of the Forces required to maintain internal security in the Colonies".<sup>99</sup> This last recommendation was the most important because it led to a significant increase in the co-operation between the Colonial Office and the Chiefs of Staff.

While the wheels of Whitehall continued to grind slowly, three and one half years after the war, progress on the issue of

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99. GEN 264, 1st Mtg, CAB 130/44.

incorporating colonial forces into the overall structure of Commonwealth defence was at last clearly discernible. On 15 March 1949 two Colonial Office officials attended a Chiefs of Staff meeting on this issue. The Colonial Office spokesman, Mr. G. F. Seel, noted:

. . . that as a result of the Ministerial meeting on 10th December, 1948, discussions took place between the Departments concerned on the procedure to be adopted for examining the overall requirements of local Colonial forces. It was decided that, as a first stage, the War Office would submit to the Chiefs of Staff estimates of the local forces required to be maintained in the Colonies, and invite the Chiefs of Staff to instruct the Joint Planning Staff to prepare a report on the proposals to be submitted by the three Service Departments. When the inter-Service requirements had been approved by the Chiefs of Staff these could be forwarded to the Colonial Office and Treasury who would then arrange for a special ad hoc working party to examine the financial and political considerations arising from the military recommendations. The work of the ad hoc working party would result in a report to Ministers covering the whole problem of Colonial defence.<sup>100</sup>

As a result the JPS was instructed to prepare a comprehensive report on colonial forces for the Chiefs of Staff.

The JPS produced a thirty-seven page report detailing both the current forces available and those required for defence throughout the colonial empire. The Chiefs of Staff approved this report and forwarded it to the Minister of Defence on 20 April.<sup>101</sup> This report provided the framework for the renewed consideration at ministerial level of the issue of raising colonial forces that would take place in the Defence Committee in early July.

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100. COS(49)42nd Mtg, Min 7, DEFE 4/20.

101. JP(49)24(Final) considered at COS(49)57th Mtg, Min 6, DEFE 4/21.

If the more co-operative spirit in the Colonial Office towards defence issues marked a change in colonial affairs from the Chiefs' of Staff point of view, there was ample continuity in the form of continued colonial defence burdens. With the emergency in Malaya percolating in the background, alarms had again been raised in December about the situation in West Africa, this time by the General Officer Commanding, General Nicholson. The Chiefs of Staff took immediate action on receiving the report on 3 December. The War Office in consultation with the Air Ministry was advised to prepare emergency plans for the possibility of internal disturbances and the Commander-in-Chief, South Atlantic was also to be warned of the possibility.<sup>102</sup> The importance of closer communication between the Chiefs of Staff and the Colonial Office again became manifest when the Chiefs of Staff next considered this issue on 17 December.

It appeared that the Colonial Office took the view that there was no need to be alarmed about developments in West Africa. The Secretary of State for the Colonies had recently visited West Africa at which time there had been no indication of the disturbances feared by General Nicholson. It had been suggested that G.O.C. West Africa should be asked to consult with the local civil authorities and submit an official appreciation on the subject.<sup>103</sup>

Despite the Colonial Office's assurance, the Chiefs of Staff continued to address this issue. On 18 February they endorsed the view that the internal security of West Africa required the creation of a local airlift capability for one infantry company.<sup>104</sup> At their

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102. COS(48)172nd Mtg, DEFE 4/18.

103. COS(48)180th Mtg, Min 2, Ibid.

104. COS(49)28th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/20.

meeting with Mr. Seel on 15 March already noted, Mr. Seel also said that the Colonial Office would support the War Office recommendation to raise an additional battalion of the Gold Coast Regiment.<sup>105</sup> Ministers ratified the raising of this additional regiment at a meeting of the Defence Committee on 23 March.<sup>106</sup> The decision of who would pay for these forces was left open. The War Office was to pay for the time being without prejudicing their chances for reimbursement once the larger issue of funding colonial forces had been resolved.

Finally, one other colonial defence issue arose in this period that was to have a significant bearing on the evolution of Commonwealth defence prior to the outbreak of the Korean War. In March 1946 on the initiative of the Chiefs of Staff the Defence Committee had approved a defence policy for Hong Kong that admitted Hong Kong was indefensible and that no attempt would be made to hold it if it were threatened by a first class power.<sup>107</sup> However, the course of the Chinese Revolution in late 1948 caused a shift in British policy. Following in the wake of the Berlin crisis and the emergency in Malaya, the communist threat to Hong Kong became a major event in the cold war in the eyes of British policy makers. The JPS in considering the "Strategic Implications of the Situation in China" saw the threat extending to the Indian subcontinent, Britain's possessions in Southeast Asia and to vital sea communications.<sup>108</sup> The Amethyst

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105. COS(49)42nd Mtg, Min 7, Ibid.

106. DO(49)9th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/8.

107. DO(46)30, CAB 131/2, considered at DO(46)7th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/1. JP(46)40, on which DO(46)30 was based, withheld CAB 84/79, was considered at COS(46)33rd Mtg, Min 2, CAB 79/45.

108. JP(48)124(Final), 12 January 1949, DEFE 6/7.

incident in April increased tension. On 27 April the Defence Committee approved the despatch to Hong Kong of a brigade group and a fighter squadron.<sup>109</sup> When Malcolm MacDonald, the Commissioner General in South East Asia, met with the Chiefs of Staff on 18 May, he left them in no doubt that he perceived the situation in Hong Kong as a cold war trial of strength similar to Berlin.<sup>110</sup> The situation had developed to such a point that the Chiefs of Staff, to some extent pushed by the politicians, now contemplated a full scale defence of Hong Kong.<sup>111</sup>

The development of the situation surrounding Hong Kong profoundly affected Commonwealth defence on three counts. First, it reinforced the growing co-operation between the Colonial Office and the Chiefs of Staff. As both organizations struggled with parallel and interconnected objectives in Hong Kong and Malaya so their overall level of co-operation increased. As we shall see shortly this co-operation spilled over to include the whole of the colonial empire. Second, it led to an increased attempt on the part of the British government to obtain dominion co-operation. Finally it led to the growth of a new appreciation of the importance of the new dominions in South Asia and the development of a new strategy towards them. After waiting for more than a year for defence talks to take place between the United Kingdom and India and Pakistan, events now channeled the relationship between Britain and the new dominions down

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109. DO(49)12th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/8.

110. COS(49)73rd Mtg, DEFE 4/21.

111. SAC(49)5th Mtg, Min 2, 19 May 1949, CAB 134/669.

a new path.

South Asia: The Origins of a New Strategy

It will be recalled that one of the reasons for the calling of the Prime Ministers's Meeting in 1948 had been to try to show the new dominions the benefits of the Commonwealth connection. In this respect the conference was a success. Attlee reported to the Cabinet after the final session of the Prime Ministers' Meeting: "A notable contribution had been made by the representatives of the three Asiatic countries of the Commonwealth; and it had been particularly encouraging to observe in their remarks the underlying assumption that their countries would continue to be members of the Commonwealth".<sup>112</sup> Attlee's comment can be seen to reflect an underlying concern as well as present satisfaction. Membership of the new dominions in the Commonwealth was perceived as a strategic asset and thus their membership continued to be a matter of vital concern to British policy makers.

Despite the positive cast of Attlee's comment on the future status of India as a Commonwealth member, the issue hung in the balance between October 1948 and April 1949. The avowed position of the Indian government to make India a republic could not but strain the Commonwealth relationship to the full. The turmoil over India's future in the Commonwealth also complicated Britain's relations with Pakistan.

As in the debates in 1947, Attlee took the lead in attempting to

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112. CM(48)65th Conclusions, Min 3, CAB 128/13.

maintain India within the Commonwealth. His global view meant that he remained continuously sensitive to the important role that India had to play. In fact, Attlee initiated the Cabinet discussions on this issue by presenting a memorandum to the Cabinet just six days after the final session of the 1948 Prime Ministers' Meeting.<sup>113</sup> In this memorandum he linked the twin problems of keeping both India and Eire in the Commonwealth in spite of the fact that both now sought to become republics. To address this issue Attlee had appointed a small group of ministers "to consider on what constitutional basis India might remain within the Commonwealth, if in the event she were unable to accept the Crown as 'a symbol of free association' in the Commonwealth". This small group of ministers reported back to the Cabinet on 12 November that in their opinion it would be hard to defend the Commonwealth as a legal entity in international law without some form of allegiance to the Crown.<sup>114</sup>

To pursue this issue, Attlee resurrected the Commonwealth Relations Committee. At this Committee's third meeting on 8 February 1949, Attlee summed up by calling for an official committee to prepare a paper on the advantages and disadvantages of the various courses of action open to members of the Commonwealth as a result of India's proposed change of status.<sup>115</sup> As a direct result, the JPS was

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113. CP(48)244, CAB 129/30, considered at CM(48)67th Conclusions, Min 3, CAB 128/13 and Confidential Annex, CAB 128/14.

114. CM(48)71st Conclusions, Min 2, Confidential Annex, Ibid.

115. CR(49)3rd Mtg, DEFE 11/31.

instructed to prepare a report on the military aspects of the problem.<sup>116</sup>

Military thinking on the strategic importance of India had already been evolving with the intensification of cold war in 1948. If anything, the cold war had raised the importance of South Asia in the calculus of Britain's strategists. The JPS had noted in their report on the "Strategic Implications of the Situation in China" on 12 January 1949:

If communism successfully spreads into the Indian sub-continent our whole position in South East Asia would become untenable.

We further conclude that the military action which we can take is:-

. . .

To continue to give India all possible military assistance, even though she should decide to leave the Commonwealth, with the object of encouraging her to take the lead in Asia in combating the spread of communism.<sup>117</sup>

This point was to become the new foundation of British strategic policy towards India. Either in or out of the Commonwealth, India must be encouraged by all means possible to act as a bulwark against communism in Asia.

On 14 February when the Vice Chiefs of Staff formally took up the request of the Commonwealth Relations Committee they were unanimous in their appraisal of the situation. Whether India remained in the Commonwealth with no allegiance to the crown, went out of the

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116. COS(49)53, Ibid.

117. JP(48)124(Final), DEFE 6/7.



Commonwealth but entered into a treaty relationship with the Commonwealth or left the Commonwealth and had no treaty relationship, their advice would remain the same. As Templer told his colleagues all aid possible must be given to India to encourage her to take the lead in Asia in combating the spirit of communism.<sup>118</sup>

The Vice Chiefs of Staff approved the JPS report requested for the Working Party on Commonwealth Relations on 21 February. The report contained the germs for a new British strategy regarding India's role in Commonwealth defence. While the report did not specifically recommend Indian neutrality in the event of a major war, it laid out the rationale for that strategy. "We do not believe, however, that the Allies will, even by 1957, be able to make any significant contribution to help India in her defence". The fact that India might not be actively involved in a war did not mean that she could not be of great assistance in such a conflict. The report listed British requirements in India in the event of war as access to the Indian economy, air transit rights, naval refueling and repair facilities and allowing transit facilities for the Gurkhas. In peace the report again stressed India's role in resisting the spread of communism. The report concluded:

Our strategic requirements cannot be met unless India is friendly both to the Commonwealth as a whole and to Pakistan.

The best way of ensuring this is for India to remain a member of the Commonwealth; failing this she must enter into close treaty relations with the United Kingdom and other Commonwealth countries.

It is unlikely that our requirements would be met if

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118. COS(49)25th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/19.

India became a foreign State with no close treaty relationship. In fact, there is a danger that India might then drift towards Russia.<sup>119</sup>

This report by the JPS was added as an appendix to CP(49)58. This Cabinet Paper was in turn used as a brief for the UK's emissaries sent to dominion capitals prior to the 1949 Prime Minister's Meeting.

The obvious similarities between this statement of British strategic interests in India and those expressed by the Chiefs of Staff in their first postwar assessment prepared for the Cabinet Mission in March 1946 should be noted. India's continued membership in the Commonwealth still remained the core the Chiefs' of Staff position. And while the Soviet threat might be more explicitly stated now than in 1946, this item was also an element of continuity in strategic thinking. What was new in this document was the idea that Indian neutrality might actually be an asset for Commonwealth defence. This idea, though not yet clearly expressed, would eventually solve the riddle which the Chiefs of Staff had struggled with since the start of their deliberations on how to incorporate an independent India effectively into postwar Commonwealth defence. A neutral India favourably disposed towards Britain and acting as a bulwark against communism in the Far East would afford the maximum security for British interests east of Suez at the minimum of cost.

While the Chiefs of Staff were adjusting their strategic concept for India, Attlee continued his efforts to keep India in the Commonwealth. He reported to the Cabinet on 3 March that it had been impossible so far to reach agreement with Nehru. He now proposed

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119. JP(49)17(Final) considered at COS(49)31st Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/20.

holding a Prime Ministers' Meeting to attempt to resolve this issue. Prior to this meeting the United Kingdom Government would send emissaries to each of the dominion capitals to try one more time to find a solution for keeping India in the Commonwealth as a republic.

He [Attlee] would, however, be glad if he could have the general endorsement of his colleagues to the view that the political advantages of retaining India within the Commonwealth were so great that Commonwealth countries would, if it proved necessary for that purpose, be justified in making some concessions from their traditional point of view about the Commonwealth connection, and taking some risks, with a view of keeping India with them. The threat of Communist encroachment in South-East Asia was very real and, from the political angle as well as from the strategic and economic angles, there were many advantages in retaining India within the Commonwealth.<sup>120</sup>

Once again the convergence of Attlee's ideas with those expressed by the Chiefs of Staff is apparent. Once again Attlee can be seen to be a prime mover in an attempt to preserve the Commonwealth and expand its role. It is worth noting that most of his supporting cast from 1946 and 1947 were no longer in position to have any direct bearing on events. Mountbatten in 1949 was again serving in the navy, Ismay was in semi-retirement and of the Chiefs of Staff only Tedder remained. Attlee was far from alone in his vision of a multi-racial Commonwealth as the world's best hope, though. He had found new apostles in Norman Brook of the Cabinet Office and Patrick Gordon Walker, the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, both of whom were among the emissaries sent to dominion capitals mentioned above.

The Prime Ministers' Meeting of 1949, held from 21 to 27 April,

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120. CM(49)17th Conclusions, Min 2; CAB 128/15.

found a solution that allowed India to remain within the Commonwealth despite her intention to become a sovereign independent republic. The final communique expressed the approved formula:

The Government of India have, however, declared and affirmed India's desire to continue her full membership of the Commonwealth of Nations and her acceptance of the King as the symbol of the free association of its independent member nations, and as such Head of the Commonwealth.<sup>121</sup>

The result of the 1949 Prime Ministers' Meeting was a tremendous triumph for Attlee's view of the Commonwealth. It marked the fulfillment of his personal minute in May 1947 calling for "the finding of a formula which will enable the greatest number of independent units to adhere to the Commonwealth without excessive uniformity in their internal constitutions or in their relationship to Great Britain".<sup>122</sup>

With the successful resolution of India's political future within the Commonwealth, the door was again opened for closer defence co-operation with both India and Pakistan. The decision over India's future status had been holding up joint moves by the Chiefs of Staff and the Commonwealth Relations Office to once again try to initiate defence discussions with these two dominions. Because of India's unsettled position, defence co-operation with Pakistan had also been deferred.

It will be recalled that just prior to the 1948 Prime Ministers' Meeting, Major-General Cawthorn had conveyed a special message to

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121. Harvey, Consultation and Co-operation, p. 23.

122. See page 96-7 above.

Attlee and then the Chiefs of Staff from the Pakistani Prime Minister seeking closer defence co-operation with the United Kingdom.<sup>123</sup> After the Prime Ministers' Meeting, Cawthorn had continued to pursue this issue. In an interview with Group Captain Stapleton, Cawthorn had indicated that the Prime Minister of Pakistan was likely to request from Attlee a defence appreciation similar to the one that had been requested by the Prime Minister of New Zealand.<sup>124</sup> The First Sea Lord responded to a secretarial minute recording this interview by questioning whether or not it would be appropriate to enter into such co-operation with Pakistan at the present time. He offered his opinion that ministerial policy was to treat India, Pakistan and Ceylon in the same manner and he doubted whether ministers would be willing to initiate defence talks with India until the current constitutional issues had been resolved. He noted in paragraph four of his memorandum ". . . it seems that the opening of defence talks with Pakistan might be at variance with present Ministerial policy".<sup>125</sup> At the Chiefs of Staff meeting on 16 December 1948 the other two Chiefs of Staff overrode the objections of the First Sea Lord citing the previous agreement of the Prime Minister to start talks on defence with Pakistan at the Staff Conference on 24 September 1948.<sup>126</sup>

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123. See page 196 above.

124. Secretary's Minute, C.O.S. 1938/18/11/8 dated 17 November 1948, DEFE 11/31.

125. COS(48)189, 3 December 1948, D11/31.

126. COS(48)180th Mtg, Min 11, DEFE 4/18.

This episode has added significance because of the light that it sheds on the working of the Chiefs of Staff secretariat. On 14 December Stapleton had written a memorandum to Hollis concerning the First Sea Lord's memorandum. Stapleton pointed out his disagreement with the First Sea Lord's memorandum based upon the previous Staff Conference with Attlee, but then went on to reveal his true colours. "Paragraph 4 seems to me to be a fairly poor reason for not taking action at the present time. It has never prevented the C.O.S. from putting forward what they want".<sup>127</sup> To put the significance of this exchange in clear perspective, the First Sea Lord, who had been in the job for just three months, had stated that he thought that a given policy should not be pursued because it was at variance with ministerial opinion. A member of the Chiefs of Staff secretariat, who had served in that capacity since before the end of the war, had replied privately to the Chief Staff Officer to the Minister of Defence, who had been his boss throughout that time, that ministerial opinion had never previously stopped the Chiefs of Staff from asking for what they wanted. The self-confidence of this memorandum certainly says a great deal about the importance that a long time member of the Chiefs of Staff secretariat attached to both the work of that committee and his perception of his own role within that organization. He felt free to disagree with a position taken by one of the Chiefs of Staff that he thought was in error and secondly, was undaunted in recommending action that he perceived as essential for the country's defence despite the fact that such a policy might be at variance with governmental policy. One would hardly expect to find

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127. Memorandum by Stapleton to Hollis, DEFE 11/31.

such self-confidence in an official who had spent years serving an organization that seldom seemed to have any influence. The Chiefs of Staff secretariat normally stayed well out of the limelight and most of their personal minutes and meeting briefs have either been destroyed or withheld from public inspection, but this clear example of one member's perception of their role rings true with the mass of circumstantial evidence of their influence and importance. Typical of such circumstantial evidence is the fact that Lord Tedder opened the Chiefs of Staff discussion on 16 December by rebutting the First Sea Lord's memorandum using the same arguments as those in Stapleton's memorandum to Hollis.

When the Minister of Defence raised objections in January about proceeding with defence talks with Pakistan, General Hollis in his turn replied that the Prime Minister had already approved of such talks.<sup>128</sup> Despite the efforts of the secretariat, the issue of defence talks with Pakistan seems to have been subsumed in February by the pressing need to find a solution to the problem of India's future status.

In early March, the Commonwealth Relations Office informed the Chiefs of Staff that both India and Pakistan had responded affirmatively to paragraph 6 of PMM(48)16(Revise) and asked when the Chiefs of Staff anticipated starting defence discussions with those two countries.<sup>129</sup> At their meeting on 9 March, the Chiefs of Staff

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128. For Alexander's objections see note from R.F. Wood to Hollis. For Hollis's reply see memorandum from Hollis to Wood, dated 2 February 1949 both in DEFE 11/31.

129. COS(49)77, 2 March 1949, DEFE 11/31.

decided that it would not be possible to hold defence discussions with India prior to determining India's future status and that defense discussions with Pakistan should be delayed so as not to upset India.<sup>130</sup>

Early in April, the Vice Chiefs of Staff approved a report on a prospective Anglo/Indian treaty to cover what appeared to be the likely possibility of India leaving the Commonwealth.<sup>131</sup> At the same meeting, however, the Vice Chiefs of Staff expressed concern lest rapid developments with respect to India might lead to defence discussions beginning with India before Pakistan.<sup>132</sup> They considered this would be a poor reward for Pakistan's loyalty in remaining in the Commonwealth. To prevent this possibility and cover all eventualities, a telegram was sent with Attlee's approval to Pakistan's Minister of Defence stating that talks would begin sometime in 1949.<sup>133</sup>

With the resolution of India's status in the final communique of the Prime Ministers' Meeting on 27 April, the blockage of further integrating these two dominions more firmly into Commonwealth defence ended. At a Staff Conference on 4 May, A. V. Alexander told the Chiefs of Staff:

. . . that he wished to draw attention to the increasing

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130. COS(49)39th Mtg, Min 4, DEFE 4/20.

131. JP(49)35(Final) considered at COS(49)53rd Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/21. This paper was circulated after the meeting as COS(49)127.

132. COS(49)53rd Mtg, Min 4, Ibid.

133. Telegram from Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations to Prime Minister of Pakistan, 14 April 1949, DEFE 11/31.



need for the closest possible co-operation with India and Pakistan in the defence field. It was greatly to our strategic advantage that these two large countries, with extensive resources in manpower and material, had decided to remain in the British Commonwealth. India and Pakistan now expected to be given all the privileges of full membership of the British Commonwealth. In particular we should be ready to give them as much help as possible over the training and equipment of their armed forces.

The Chiefs of Staff only opposition to these sentiments concerned the age old problem of classified information and the American connection. While acknowledging the problems created by American attitudes in this area, Alexander said, "The importance of establishing the closest possible relations with India and Pakistan in the Defence field was, however, so great that a way round this difficulty must be found".<sup>134</sup>

As a result the Vice Chiefs of Staff established a working group to examine the question of supplying classified information to all members of the Commonwealth not just the new South Asian dominions.<sup>135</sup> On 31 May they agreed to offer vacancies to both India and Pakistan to the joint service colleges for 1950.<sup>136</sup> In taking this step, the Chiefs of Staff, albeit at the prodding of their political masters, had decided to go ahead with doing their utmost to treat the new dominions as partners in Commonwealth defence and to sort out the consequences of doing so on their American alliance afterwards.

Just as co-operation with the United States, defence planning

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134. COS(49)65th Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/21.

135. COS(49)76th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/22.

136. COS(49)80th Mtg, Min 3, Ibid.

with the old dominions, and integrating the colonial empire into Commonwealth defence had advanced between the end of the 1948 Prime Ministers' Meeting and the end of June 1949, so to had Britain's attempt to find a new role for the dominions in South Asia. The most important issue had been India's future status within the Commonwealth and that had been beneficially resolved at the Prime Ministers' Meeting in April 1949. With that resolution the door had been opened for closer defence co-operation between the United Kingdom and the new South Asian dominions. It appeared possible that the defence talks that had initially been planned for immediately after independence might once again have a chance of taking place. However, the situation was clouded by the ongoing dispute over Kashmir and the evolution of Britain's own strategy. The Kashmir problem would continue to bedevil British relations with both India and Pakistan for more than another two decades. All attempts at defence co-operation had to be weighed in terms of their potential impact on that dispute. More important in the immediate future for Commonwealth defence was the beginnings of a new British strategic concept for the area. This new strategic concept would constructively face the limits of British and in a larger context Allied power. The new concept saw the importance of India and Pakistan more in political than in military terms. Militarily they might even be liabilities. As bulwarks against the spread of communism in Asia, however, they could be great political assets. This new strategic concept had not been clearly enunciated yet, but together with new concepts about Britain's role in Europe and in the Middle East would mark a major shift in the evolution of British global strategy in the year preceeding the outbreak of the Korean War.

### The Middle East: Holding Firm

Unlike the other aspects of Commonwealth defence in the period from October 1948 through June 1949, Britain made no particular progress in improving its strategic position in the Middle East. British strategists continued to try to hold the line in the Middle East while being buffeted by turmoil within the region and by the problem of trying to incorporate their own position in the Middle East under the larger strategic umbrella they hoped to share with the Americans.

The continuing turmoil in Palestine created by Israeli independence occupied a great deal of the Chiefs of Staff time. Their deliberations on this issue focused on attempts to stabilize the situation. Their goal was to limit damage to the British position in the Middle East. They continually fretted about how to support Transjordan against Israeli aggression. Because of King Abdullah's close co-operation and British military links with the Arab Legion, they believed a severe reverse for Transjordan would be extremely damaging to British interests throughout the Middle East. Yet, they were also extremely reluctant to put British forces in the line of fire. As we have seen the Chiefs of Staff had agreed if Israel invaded Transjordan Britain should attempt to honor its treaty commitments to the latter through air power and supply. British ground forces should be used only as a last resort.<sup>137</sup> This position remained the bedrock of the Chiefs' of Staff policy throughout the

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137. See page 171 above.

period of post-independence turbulence.

The turmoil over Palestine in late 1948 and early 1949 caused friction in the normally harmonious relations between the Chiefs of Staff and the Foreign Office. Their differences were over methods, and not objectives. The Chiefs of Staff saw supply of the Arab Legion as a matter of primary concern, but Bevin and the Foreign Office were reluctant to break the United Nations' arms embargo to the region.<sup>138</sup> Both sides supported stationing British troops at Aqaba in January 1949, but they differed over the role that these troops should play and how it should be accomplished.<sup>139</sup> Following the shooting down of five RAF aircraft by the Israelis and Israeli violations of the U.N. truce, Bevin sought and received Defence Committee permission to resume military supply of Egypt and Transjordan, but subsequently decided against using that authority.<sup>140</sup> The Chiefs of Staff became increasingly irate over the failure to provide adequate military supplies to all Arabs.<sup>141</sup>

The reason for the Chiefs of Staff irritation is not hard to deduce. One can hardly expect to create sound military alliances if

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138. See COS(48)153rd Mtg, Min 4 and 158th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/17; COS(48)173rd Mtg, Min 1 and 185th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/18.

139. Sending a battalion to Aqaba was approved at DO(49)1st Mtg, Min 1, 3 January 1949, CAB 131/8.

140. Approval given at DO(49)2nd Mtg, Min 3, 10 January 1949, Ibid. For Bevin's decision against using that authority see DO(49)4th Mtg, Min 3, 4 February 1949, Ibid.

141. See COS(49)42nd Mtg, Min 1, 15 March 1949 and COS(49)44th Mtg, Min 4, 21 March 1949 both in DEFE 4/20 and COS(49)55th Mtg, Min 1, 13 April 1949, DEFE 4/21.

one is not perceived as being a reliable partner. Failure to supply the Arabs with the weapons that they needed put Britain in a difficult position. Britain had treaties with Egypt, Transjordan and Iraq all of which had defence clauses. Britain's strategic position in the Middle East rested on those treaties. We have already seen the difficulties Britain had encountered in trying to renegotiate her treaties with Egypt and Iraq. The only successful renegotiation since the war had been with Transjordan. From the Chiefs of Staff point of view, supplying weapons to these countries in limited quantities could demonstrate the usefulness of Britain as an ally. More importantly in the case of Transjordan it would give that country the ability to defend itself. The Chiefs of Staff thought it high folly to deny Transjordan the means of defending itself and at the same time to be making contingency plans for British forces to do just that. Finally, the Chiefs of Staff hoped to moderate what they perceived to be increasingly aggressive behaviour on the part of Israel.

To classify the Chiefs of Staff position as strictly pro-Arab, however, would be a misinterpretation. They were acutely aware of the strategic importance of the entire region and their position was based upon their strategic calculations. In discussing a report by the JPS on "Palestine - Possible Political Developments", General Slim clearly stated the case:

Nevertheless, in the event of war, we might, if necessary, have to take what we wanted in Palestine by force. [The report had stated that the defence of the Middle East could only be conducted in and through Palestine.] If we had to do this, it would be an additional burden for our forces in the Middle East so the Chiefs of Staff hoped that we should be able to obtain the co-operation of the Jews as well as that of the Arabs; nevertheless, Jewish co-operation, however important, must definitely be considered as of secondary importance to the

co-operation of the Arabs which was essential to the security of the Middle East Base.<sup>142</sup>

Despite such brave talk about taking what they needed by force the Chiefs of Staff remained concerned about the damage done to their Middle East strategy by the continued turmoil in Palestine. At a Vice Chiefs of Staff meeting on 6 May 1949, the Vice Chief of the Air Staff asked Sir John Troutbeck of the Foreign Office specifically about the long range prospects for co-operation with the Jews and the Arabs. Troutbeck responded that while such co-operation was the goal of the Foreign Office, "It was, however, very difficult to see how this could be achieved for even moderate Israelis made no secret of thier [sic] opinion that Israel ought to absorb all Palestine and even Transjordan". This response led to the observation that current British emergency plans for the defence of the Middle East might not be realistic, ". . . if we had to use force to take up our defensive positions and to establish our lines of communication through Israel, we should be gravely weakened from the outset".<sup>143</sup> The conclusion for the Chiefs of Staff was obvious. Continued turmoil in Palestine produced a festering sore that could undermine British strategy and continually threatened to undermine British prestige.

If regional turmoil thwarted consolidation of British strategy in the Middle East on one hand, global strategic planning also did little to strengthen Britain's position in the Middle East. British plans for the Middle East had always called for a large American input. It will

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142. JP(49)11(Final) considered at COS(49)26th Mtg, Min 5, Confidential Annex, 16 February 1949, DEFE 4/20.

143. COS(49)66th Mtg, Min 7, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/21.

be recalled that as far back as April 1946 in the row between Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff over the Middle East, Tedder had stated that the Chiefs of Staff anticipated the use of British bases in the Middle East by U.S. heavy bombers. Now that American planners were actively working with British planners one set of problems had been solved. British planners no longer had to base their plans merely on the hope of American co-operation in war. Yet planning with the Americans raised new problems. The Americans seemed willing to rely on British assets in the Middle East without recognizing the weakness of Britain's position or being very co-operative in helping to maintain that position. We have already seen that the Americans were unwilling to take part in joint defence talks with the Egyptians proposed by the British Chiefs of Staff. American policies towards Israel and Cyrenaica also often seemed to be at cross purposes with British interests. Thus, American support at the global planning level did not translate directly into support for Britain's regional position within the Middle East.

Planning with the Americans also led to increased commitments, commitments that Britain was finding harder and harder to bear as the cold war heated up. The Middle East seemed to bear the brunt of Britain's shortages. We have already seen that the creation of the Western European Union and NATO had led to Britain assuming a commitment to fight on the continent in the event of war, though not yet to sending reinforcements. This commitment had been assumed with the hope of encouraging the same response from the Americans. So far this hope had not borne fruit as American plans still called for evacuating their forces. On 29 April 1949 Lieutenant General Templer

informed the Chiefs of Staff that Britain would be unable to meet the full build up of forces called for in the orders of battle agreed between British and American planners for the defence of the Middle East. Recent deployments to Malaya and Hong Kong would leave Britain short of troops and currently Britain could supply only half of the vehicles required to meet commitments in the first two months of an emergency.<sup>144</sup> Thus as British planners succeeded in gaining other nations' support to make their global security system viable, they were brought face to face with their own overtaxed and limited resources.

Finally, American security restrictions continued to hamper Britain in her attempt to consolidate her position in the Middle East. The Americans unwillingness to allow any mention of combined planning in the Middle East had two detrimental effects. It probably increased Egyptian suspicions of British duplicity. The Foreign Office informed the Chiefs of Staff that, despite the secrecy that surrounded planning with the American, high ranking Egyptians were aware of what was going on.<sup>145</sup> Having to maintain a facade did not help British negotiators to win Egyptian trust. The second detrimental effect was the difficulty that American restrictions placed on British policy makers attempts to gain the commitments of New Zealand, Australia and South Africa to support Britain's position in the Middle East.

The overall weakness in Britain's position in the Middle East

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144. COS(49)62nd Mtg, Min 9, DEFE 4/21.

145. COS(49)15th Mtg, Min 7, 31 January 1949, DEFE 4/19.



stands in stark contrast to the progress made in the other four areas of Commonwealth defence between October 1948 and June 1949. Global planning with the Americans had been steadily evolving since October 1947 and had become institutionalized. All of the four old dominions had agreed to peacetime military planning and were actively involved in the process. Co-operation between the military strategists and the Colonial Office had finally been put on a more positive footing and plans for the integration of the colonial empire into Commonwealth defence were proceeding. The place of the new South Asian dominions within the Commonwealth seemed to have been settled in a fairly advantageous manner with the possibility of new opportunities for co-operation. Only in the Middle East did the situation in June 1949 seem no better than it had been the previous October. However, British weaknesses in the Middle East reflected important weaknesses in the whole structure of Commonwealth defence. The problems of regional turmoil, keeping American support aligned with British goals and keeping commitments acceptable within the constraints of limited resources were most obvious in the Middle East, but undercut the whole edifice of Commonwealth defence. In the last year before the outbreak to the Korean War, British strategists had their work cut out for them.

## Chapter 7: The Rickety Edifice: July 1949 - June 1950

The last year before the outbreak of the Korean War proved to be very difficult for British policy makers as they attempted to maintain the momentum established in the previous nine months between October 1948 and June 1949. To an extent they became the victims of their own success. Their success in developing a global strategy with the Americans brought them face to face with their own weaknesses. Now that they had succeeded in erecting a rudimentary structure of Commonwealth defence, they were confronted not only with the problem of continued construction, but also with the problem of maintenance. Success in planning now manifested itself in increased obligations. British policy makers now found themselves in the position of landlords trying desperately to complete a half finished building and live in it at the same time. They had to pay its utility bills as well as continued construction costs. They had built a shelter, but it was a rickety edifice.

### The Role of the Old Dominions

One of the premises of this work has been that Commonwealth defence in the immediate postwar years embraced more than just the "constitutional" Commonwealth. From the outset American support was seen as an integral part of Commonwealth defence. The goal of British strategists was not so much to have a Commonwealth that could stand apart from the United States as a so called "third force", as to form an association that could stand beside the United States. To return to

the allusion to a chorus line, after almost four years of manoeuvring, the British producers of this show had all of the actors on stage and roughly in a line. The question now was whether they could be made to sing and dance.

The first task of British policy makers was to get the old dominions to dance as well as sing. Since the end of the war they had been quite clear in demanding to have a say in world affairs, but their efforts with regard to world security did not match the volume of their rhetoric. The goals of British military planners with respect to the old dominions were twofold. The first objective was to get the dominions to assume regional responsibilities and the second was to get them to play their share in global security. The amount of effort that they should direct to the latter depended on the size of the burden and the importance of the role that they played in the former. In any case, the goal was to get them to pick up as much as possible of Britain's over-extended global commitments.

Of the four old dominions Canada caused British strategists the least problem. Canadian involvement in NATO amply served British purposes by bearing some of the burden for a continental commitment. In so doing, Canada had reversed the policy adopted at the Imperial Conference of 1926 when along with the other dominions she had refused to assume any responsibilities in Europe under the Locarno Pact. The creation of NATO with the adherence of both the United States and Canada had fulfilled the prescription that Attlee had given the War Cabinet in July 1943 for a postwar settlement in Europe.<sup>1</sup>

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1. See page 140 above.

Nor was NATO the only military link between the Canadians and the British. Although it had initially been the result of an American invitation, as seen earlier, Canadian planners continued to join British and American planners forming the "A.B.C. planners". At the planning sessions in Washington in September and October 1949, British planners felt that they had drawn very helpful support from the Canadians in dealing with the Americans. The JPS reported, "The Canadian planners were much more world minded than previously and gave us excellent support in debate; in particular their suggestion to examine the possible allocation of two Canadian divisions to fight in the Middle East with the remainder of the Commonwealth, evidently took the Americans by surprise".<sup>2</sup> With Canada fully employed in the North Atlantic region and assisting in shaping global plans with the Americans, British policy makers had little to complain about with respect to the Canadians and the development of Commonwealth defence. Who would have imagined such a turn of events during the heated postwar debate between Attlee and MacKenzie King over the Canadian decision to withdraw all occupation forces from Germany in February 1946?

With respect to the other three "old" dominions the situation was not nearly so straight forward. British planners adopted a two-tiered approach to strategic planning with Australia and New Zealand. The first step was to get them to assume responsibilities on a regional level in the Southwest Pacific. The second step was to get these two dominions to make a commitment to the defence of the Middle East.

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2. JP(49)133(Final), 14 October 1949, DEFE 6/11.

Britain's weakness required their aid if the Middle East was to continue to be an area of Commonwealth responsibility in Anglo/American global planning. The two-tiered approach was really for the benefit of Australian sensibilities. New Zealand willingly adopted commitments in both regions. A change of governments in both Australia and New Zealand in late 1949, however, caused a temporary hiatus in developing defence co-operation. Even the normally smooth defence co-operation with New Zealand came to a virtual standstill in the first six months of 1950.

In trying to reach even the first step in this two-tiered approach, the Chiefs of Staff continued to encounter opposition from Britain's colonial agents. Malcolm MacDonald, the United Kingdom's Commissioner General in South East Asia, had again expressed concern about Australia being given any authority for defence planning with respect to Malaya. Such was the sensitivity of this issue, that at their meeting on 18 July the Vice Chiefs of Staff approved a telegram drafted by the Commonwealth Relations Office for the United Kingdom's High Commissioners in both Australia and New Zealand "that no public announcement should be made in connection with the visit of the planning team, and that no publicity should be given to the substance of the talks".<sup>3</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff received the reports of the joint planning team's visit to Australia and New Zealand on 21 September 1949. The productivity of the visit is reflected in the four reports submitted

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3. COS(49)103rd Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/23.

by the Planning Team.<sup>4</sup> There was little debate on the issues of "Allied High Command in War" or "ANZAM<sup>5</sup> Area Boundaries",<sup>6</sup> but considerable discussion developed around "Procedure for Progressing Planning in the ANZAM Area":<sup>7</sup>

In discussion it was agreed that there was no reason why the planning for the control of sea communications should not be initiated by the Australians now. As far as Malaya was concerned, however, it would be undesirable to give them control of planning at the moment. It was agreed also that before the matter could be taken it would be advisable to consult the Commanders-in-Chief, Far East, and the British Defence Co-ordination Committee [Far East]. On receipt of their advice the Colonial Office and Commonwealth Relations Office would be consulted on these proposals.

Thus the Chiefs of Staff approved of the Australian Chiefs of Staff assuming primary planning responsibility for the defence of sea communications in the Southwest Pacific. The Australians would initiate the planning. The British Chiefs of Staff would be represented through the Joint Service Liaison Staff in Australia with planners from the staff of the British Commanders-in-Chief, Far East being attached for detailed planning. The New Zealand Chiefs of Staff would also be represented through their Service Liaison Staff. This agreement marked another step forward in the development of a viable system of Commonwealth defence that the British Chiefs of Staff had

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4. JP(49)99(Revised Final) by the JPS forwarded JP(49)100,101,102 and 104 by the planning team. JP(49)99,101,102 and 104, DEFE 6/10. JP(49)100 withheld. These reports were considered at COS(49)139th Mtg, Min 4, DEFE 4/24.

5. ANZAM is an acronym for Australia, New Zealand and Malaya.

6. JP(49)101(Final) and 102(Final) respectively.

7. JP(49)104.(Final) The recommendations made by the planning team in this paper were discussed in JP(49)99.

sought since the end of the war. In the case of Malaya, because of the difficulty of separating internal from external defence during the present emergency, the Chiefs of Staff opposed giving Australia any immediate responsibility for the colony's defence.

A more important milestone in dominion co-operation in the development of Commonwealth defence took place in mid-September. In a personal letter the Prime Minister of New Zealand wrote Attlee that following his discussions with Attlee and the British Chiefs of Staff at the end of 1948 and the successful referendum in New Zealand on National Service:

I desire to inform you that the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff have been directed to organise and train the New Zealand land and air forces on the understanding that, in the event of the war involving the countries of the Commonwealth, they will, unless there is a major change affecting New Zealand in the strategic situation now forecast, be employed in accordance with the proposals recommended by the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff.<sup>8</sup>

The recommendations of the United Kingdom's Chiefs of Staff, it will be recalled, had been that the New Zealand forces would reinforce the British position in the Middle East. For the first time in history, the United Kingdom Government had been given a prior commitment by a dominion government of military support, and what is more the specific nature of that support. Attlee responded on 29 September 1949:

I am very glad to learn that the proposals submitted to you last year by the United Kingdom Chiefs of Staff have been accepted and that the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff have been directed to organise and train the New Zealand land and air forces on the understanding that they will be employed in accordance with those proposals, if the need should unhappily arise.

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8. Fraser's letter, dated 14 September 1949, and Attlee's reply can be found in appendices I and II respectively of COS(49)367, DEFE 5/17.

Unfortunately, the extremely secret and personal nature of this communication caused difficulties in United Kingdom/New Zealand defence planning when Sidney Holland, the leader of the National Party, replaced Peter Fraser as New Zealand's Prime Minister following a general election at the end of November.

The follow up to the Chiefs of Staff meeting on 21 September on planning with Australia and New Zealand did not take place until 9 December. In the ensuing time interval, they had received reports from the British Defence Co-ordination Committee, Far East, the Australian Defence Committee and the United Kingdom Service Liaison Staff in New Zealand and thus had a number of issues on which to reach decisions. Representatives from both the Colonial Office and the Commonwealth Relations Office were present. The committee endorsed the recommendation of the British Defence Co-ordination Committee, Far East, that the defence of Malaya should remain a responsibility of the United Kingdom, but with Australian and New Zealand representation in the planning at Singapore. In the event of war, although the British Chiefs of Staff had some reservations, they were willing to endorse the position for the present that forces in the area would fall under the control of the ANZAM Chiefs of Staff.<sup>9</sup> They approved direct communication between the New Zealand's military authorities and the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East. Finally, the meeting noted with approval the procedures set down by the Commonwealth Relations Office for handling defence planning with the Australian government. In

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9. The ANZAM Chiefs of Staff consisted of the Australian Chiefs of Staff sitting with the accredited representatives of the of the United Kingdom and New Zealand.



planning matters between the two countries requiring ministerial approval, ministerial approval by the government of the United Kingdom would be passed to Australian service authorities via the United Kingdom Service Liaison Staff in Australia. The British government would make no direct approaches to the Australian government unless requested to do so by the Australian service authorities.<sup>10</sup> The JPS formalized these proposals and sent them back to the Chiefs of Staff for their approval on 6 January 1950.<sup>11</sup> On 16 January the Minister of Defence approved a draft letter to accompany the Chiefs' of Staff proposals for co-ordination with the Foreign Office, Commonwealth Relations Office and Colonial Office. Following the approval of these departments the proposals were to be sent to the Chiefs of Staff of Australia and New Zealand for presentation to their respective governments.<sup>12</sup> On 20 February, the Vice Chiefs of Staff learned that ministers had approved their proposals as embodied in three papers, "Procedures for Planning in the Anzam Area", "Allied High Command in War - Anzam Area" and "Planning for the Deployment of Australian and New Zealand Forces Surplus to the Requirements of the Anzam Area". The Chiefs of Staff secretariat then forwarded these papers using the procedures previously agreed.<sup>13</sup> Slowly but surely defence co-operation with Australia and New Zealand continued to edge forward

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10. COS(49)183rd Mtg, Min 4, DEFE 4/27.

11. COS(50)3rd Mtg, Min 8 and 9, DEFE 4/28.

12. COS(50)10th Mtg, Min 6, Ibid.

13. COS(50)30th Mtg, Min 6, DEFE 4/29. These reports are COS(50)68, 66 and 67 respectively, DEFE 5/19.

gradually taking more concrete forms.

While co-operation between the service authorities in the United Kingdom and those in the dominions proceeded, the Colombo Conference of Commonwealth Foreign Ministers afforded the opportunity to press forward with defence co-operation at the political level as well. At the Defence Committee Meeting on 15 November 1949 during the discussion on the "Size and Shape of the Armed Forces, 1950-53", the Minister of Defence had suggested that Bevin use the Colombo Conference for this purpose. At the same meeting Philip Noel Baker, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, also seemed to be fired by the idea of trying to get greater dominion support for Britain's global defence burdens.

The Chiefs of Staff considered minutes addressing the ideas of both Bevin and Noel Baker on 30 December. Bevin had put forward three proposed lines of approach that he might use in his discussions with Commonwealth Foreign Ministers at Colombo.

The first was whether he should try to give an impetus to the planning which had been proceeding on the Service level with Australia, New Zealand and South Africa by endeavouring to get the Governments of these countries to give it their general blessing. The second idea, which the Foreign Secretary was turning over in his mind, was whether it would be desirable to suggest to the Commonwealth countries that they should make some financial contribution to the cost of Commonwealth defence. Thirdly, the Foreign Secretary was considering whether it would be in our interests to propose some form of Regional Pact covering the centre of the world - the Middle East and the Indian Ocean - which would include as members the United Kingdom, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa, and certain Middle East countries, notably Egypt.<sup>14</sup>

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14. COS(49)190th Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/27.

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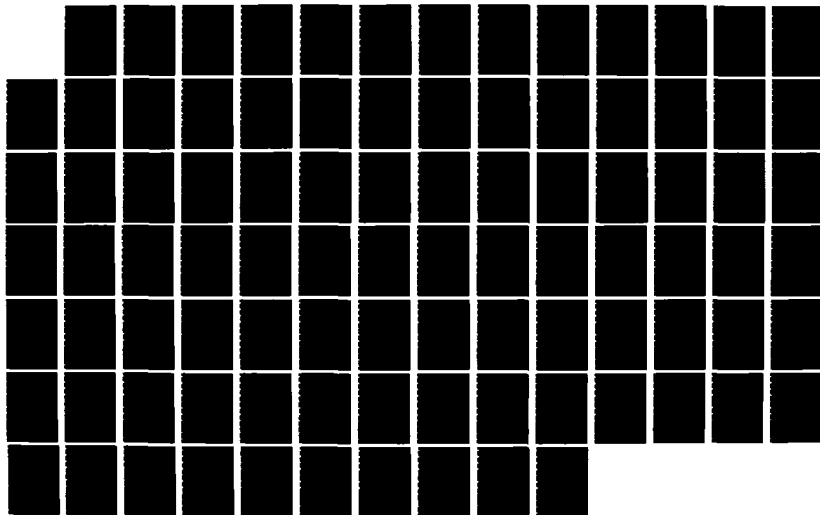
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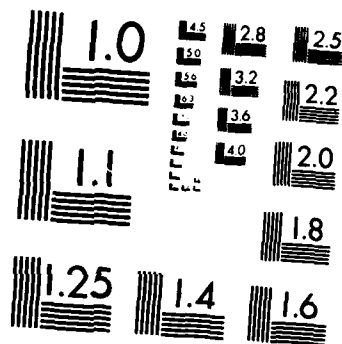
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The committee dismissed the idea of financial aid as being unlikely to appeal to other members of the Commonwealth who would perceive such a request as asking for a contribution to the United Kingdom's defence budget. The Chiefs of Staff along with representatives from the Foreign and Commonwealth Relations Offices focused on combining the first and third of Bevin's ideas. As the minute by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations differed in some important aspects with the ideas expressed during the meeting, the Chiefs of Staff agreed to produce their own paper on this topic in conjunction with the Foreign Office.

Attlee had decided that the minute by the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations should be taken by the China and South East Asia Committee at its meeting on Monday 2 January 1950.<sup>15</sup> The Chiefs of Staff Secretariat completed the Chiefs of Staff alternate paper on Saturday 31 December 1949. Air Vice Marshal Sir William Elliot, the Chief Staff Officer to the Minister of Defence,<sup>16</sup> met with Attlee on Saturday to discuss how he would like the Chiefs' of Staff paper handled. Attlee ruled that he did not want the Chiefs' of Staff paper distributed for the meeting. He was willing to have Bevin take it with him for his personal use at Colombo. Attlee also wished the Chiefs of Staff to attend the Monday meeting of the China and South East Asia Committee. They could feel free to express the ideas contained in their paper, but were not to reveal the existence of the

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15. The Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations minute "Defence Burdens and the British Commonwealth" eventually became the Defence Committee Paper DO(49)89, CAB 131/7.

16. Elliot had replaced General Hollis in this position in April 1949.

paper itself.<sup>17</sup>

Noel Baker's approach while stressing the advantages of Commonwealth co-operation on defence issues and the progress that had been made in the last year came down firmly on the side of caution. At the China and South East Asia Committee meeting he stated that "In considering how best to promote closer Commonwealth collaboration in planning, and how to persuade each Commonwealth country to assume a greater share of the financial burden, he was convinced that there was no alternative but to proceed cautiously".<sup>18</sup> The crux of the problem as he saw it was:

In fact, we are faced by this dilemma: we shall not secure United States assistance unless the United States Government can be satisfied that Commonwealth countries are themselves prepared to make a genuine contribution: but it will be difficult to obtain Commonwealth commitments until the Commonwealth Governments feel they have some reinsurance for their own defence, by the promise of American help in case of need.<sup>19</sup>

Noel Baker's solution to this dilemma was to patiently try to inveigle Commonwealth governments into greater defence commitments. The Chiefs of Staff took a more positive, specific and forceful approach to the problem. They first laid out the basic fact that the United Kingdom could no longer afford singlehandedly to maintain its position in the Middle East. As planning at the service level for the defence of this region had already taken place between the United Kingdom and certain

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17. Letter from Sir William Elliot to the three Chiefs of Staff, 31 December 1949, DEFE 11/1.

18. SAC(50)1st Mtg, Min 2, 2 January 1950, CAB 134/670.

19. DO(49)89, CAB 131/7.

Commonwealth countries, they suggested:

It could then be suggested that the Commonwealth Governments concerned should consider entering into an Agreement to make certain definite contributions to the defence of the Middle East and to the communications in the Indian Ocean area in the event of war. This Agreement would serve as the framework for a broader agreement to which other Middle East countries - notably Egypt - would later be asked to subscribe.<sup>20</sup>

Reflecting the Chiefs' of Staff ideas, the minutes of the meeting record, "the principal need at the moment was to bring the majority of the Commonwealth Governments to a realisation of the importance of the Middle East in relation to their own countries - and to carry each of them to a point where they would make firm commitments to send men and materials to the defence of that area in war".<sup>21</sup>

Bevin's talks at Colombo with the political representatives of New Zealand, Australia and South Africa netted little. He talked to representatives from Australia and New Zealand on 13 January 1950 and to those from South Africa on 14 January. Receiving noncommittal responses on both occasions, Bevin retreated behind the facade that he had merely wanted to share ideas and was not seeking a definite reply.<sup>22</sup>

Bevin's lack of success explains why the Chiefs of Staff saw no

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20. "Defence Burdens and the Commonwealth", under the cover letter by Sir William Elliot, 31 December 1949, cited above, DEFE 11/1.

21. SAC(50)1st Mtg, Min 2, CAB 134/670.

22. Records of both meetings can be found in "Conversations and Speeches of the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs during the Commonwealth Meeting on Foreign Affairs at Colombo and during his return journey to London", FO 800/449.

specific results from the Colombo Conference. In an attempt to find out what had happened, Sir William Elliot suggested on 15 February that the Chiefs of Staff invite Sir Percivale Liesching of the Commonwealth Relations Office to give them a first hand account.<sup>23</sup> The Chiefs of Staff agreed and the meeting took place on 1 March. The minutes mention Colombo only in the first sentence stating the topic of conversation. For this meeting, Elliot had prepared an aide memoire on ways of making further progress in defence co-operation with the dominions and this became the topic of discussion. The committee particularly focused on finding a method for speeding up the process of getting Australia to join New Zealand in making a commitment to the defence of the Middle East. To this end the committee agreed that the Commonwealth Relations Office should send a telegram to the United Kingdom's High Commissioner in Australia instructing him to continue to press this issue with the new Australian Prime Minister.<sup>24</sup> Liesching also pointed out that there was some question of holding the line on New Zealand's commitment to the Middle East. New Zealand's new government desired to cut defence spending and was inclined to focus on the Pacific. With respect to South Africa, India and Pakistan, the committee agreed that at present no further defence initiatives should be taken.<sup>25</sup> In summary, defence co-operation with all of the dominions but Canada was stalled and in the case of New Zealand possibly sliding backwards in March 1950.

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23. COS(50)27th Mtg, Min 7, DEFE 4/29.

24. Sir Robert Menzies.

25. COS(50)33rd Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/29.



On 26 April Liesching again addressed the Chiefs of Staff on the issue of how best to proceed in attempting to secure a commitment from Australia and confirm that of New Zealand to help defend the Middle East. He proposed that the new Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations<sup>26</sup> should make a trip to these two dominions in June accompanied by one of the Chiefs of Staff. The Chiefs of Staff agreed to this proposal.<sup>27</sup> Slim was chosen as the Chiefs' of Staff representative. His brief left no doubt as to the purpose of the mission for the Chiefs of Staff point of view.

The original object was to follow up the work done on a planning level during the visit of the Joint Planning Team to Australia and New Zealand in the Summer of 1949. In particular the visit by the Chief of the Imperial General Staff was timed to take place when the papers resulting from the Planners' visit had reached Ministers. He could thus assist in hastening getting Ministerial approval of planning and their agreement to send forces to the Middle East.<sup>28</sup>

Slim was still on his trip to Australia and New Zealand at the time of the outbreak of the Korean War, so the issue still hung in the balance.

At the same time as the Chiefs of Staff continued to push to secure an Australian commitment to the Middle East, they also sought Australian involvement in the emergency in Malaya. In this area, however, as we have already seen, they had to tread carefully to avoid

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26. Following the General Election of 23 February 1950, Patrick Gordon Walker replaced Philip Noel Baker in this position.

27. COS(50)66th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/30.

28. COS(50)81st Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, 25 May 1950, DEFE 4/31. The brief itself JP(50)66(Final) is withheld in both DEFE 4/31 and DEFE 6/13.

stepping on the toes of either the Colonial Office or Malcolm MacDonald. The Chiefs of Staff aired the idea of seeking Australian air support in Malaya on both 1 March and 3 April.<sup>29</sup> At the latter meeting the idea that Australian ground forces might eventually be requested was mooted. Somewhat to the Chiefs of Staff surprise in May they faced two separate offers of ground troops from the Australians. The first offer came from the Chief of the Australian General Staff, General Rowlett in a discussion with Slim. Rowlett suggested that the British government ask the Australian government to send a battalion to Malaya. He said that Australian service authorities would welcome such a request and he felt that the Australian government would agree. The Chiefs of Staff hesitated to make any decision because of the political sensitivity of employing Australian ground forces in Malaya.<sup>30</sup> Their dilemma was solved two days later when they considered a different offer, this time from the Australian Prime Minister, Mr. Menzies. Menzies offered to send a small force of Australian officers experienced in jungle warfare. In consultation with representatives from the Commonwealth Relations and the Colonial Offices, the Chiefs of Staff agreed that the optimum solution would be to accept Menzies's offer. It would be less politically sensitive and would leave the door open to ask for greater assistance in the future if it was needed. The Vice Chiefs of Staff thus requested the Commonwealth Relations Office to inform the United Kingdom's High Commissioner in Australia that they would be pleased to accept the Australian Prime

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29. COS(50)33rd Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/29 and COS(50)55th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/30.

30. COS(50)77th Mtg, Min 8, 17 May 1950, DEFE 4/31.

Minister's offer.<sup>31</sup> With these offers of co-operation in Malaya, the atmosphere for obtaining greater co-operation with Australia for Commonwealth defence looked auspicious on the departure of the CIGS.

At the time of Slim's departure, co-operation with New Zealand also showed signs of progress that had been absent since the change of government the previous December. The new government in New Zealand had not considered Fraser's previous commitment to Attlee to send New Zealand forces to the Middle East in the event of war until March of 1950.<sup>32</sup> On 22 May the Vice Chiefs of Staff took note that the New Zealand Chiefs of Staff had approved the papers forwarded to them on planning in the ANZAM area and had in turn submitted them to their own Minister of Defence.<sup>33</sup> On 31 May the New Zealand Chief of the General Staff had a detailed discussion with the Vice Chiefs of Staff. He reported the progress that had been made since the successful referendum on conscription and also the reservations of the new government concerning New Zealand's commitment of forces to the Middle East. Because of the sensitivity of New Zealand's commitment to the Middle East, the committee decided that it would be premature for him to visit the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East.<sup>34</sup>

The touchy nerves of governments in both Australia and New

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31. COS(50)79th Mtg, Min 1, 19 May 1950, Ibid.

32. See telegrams from UK Service Liaison Staff to Ministry of Defence, 16 March 1950, and from UK High Commissioner to Commonwealth Relations Office, 25 March 1950, DEFE 1/11.

33. COS(50)80th Mtg, Min 11, DEFE 4/31.

34. COS(50)82nd Mtg, Min 1, Ibid.

Zealand point out the importance of the Slim's mission. Although this mission was still in progress at the time the Korean War broke out, and thus lies beyond the bounds of this study, a cursory scan of the evidence does not bear out Ronald Lewin's contention in Slim: The Standardbearer that it was a failure.<sup>35</sup> As an example, a brief prepared for the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting held in January 1951 stated, "The Chiefs of Staff emphasized that we must hold the Australians and New Zealanders very firmly to their contribution to Middle East Defence".<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, defence planning with South Africa just prior to the Korean War also reflected a cautious and secretive commitment to British global strategy. As with Australia and New Zealand, British strategists sought to get a South African commitment to the Middle East. Throughout the year prior to the Korean War, planning with South Africa had been accomplished only by the most covert of means. Little progress had been made following the successful trip of the joint planning team in May 1949. General Beyers, the Chief of the South African General Staff, had tried surreptitiously to carry on planning with the British services without the approval of the South African Minister of Defence.<sup>37</sup> General Beyers resignation in January 1950 put South African defence co-operation on ice. However, the United Kingdom's High Commissioner in South Africa, Evelyn Baring,

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35. Ronald Lewin, Slim: The Standardbearer, (London, 1976), pp.275-6.

36. Brief for "Role of the Other Commonwealth Countries in Resisting Aggression: Possibilities of Developing", 20 December 1950, DEFE 1/11.

37. See COS(49)462, 30 December 1949, DEFE 5/18.

continued to take an active interest in integrating South Africa into Commonwealth defence. In a meeting with the Chiefs of Staff on 19 June 1950, he reported that in recent talks the South African Defence Minister, Mr. Erasmus, had told him that "in the event of war with Russia, the Union would be prepared to send armed forces to any part of Africa including Egypt". Beyond that statement, however, Erasmus had been very cautious. He continued, "On the other hand, in later talks with the United Kingdom Service Liaison Staff, General Du Toit [the new South African Chief of the General Staff] had opened out considerably and elaborated on the forces which might be committed".<sup>38</sup> Baring, the Commonwealth Relations Office and the Chiefs of Staff agreed that further progress in defence relations with South Africa should be handled with great care. It was important that they not be rushed and that the ground be properly prepared. Baring thought that early September 1950 would be the optimum date for a conference on the South African contribution to the defence of Africa that had been proposed by Erasmus.<sup>39</sup> The strongly anti-communist bent of the Nationalist politicians provided a strong lever for winning their co-operation, but it had to be used extremely cautiously so as not to at the same time arouse their thinly veiled scepticism of British connections.

By the outbreak of the Korean War, British policy makers had succeeded in gaining greater peacetime co-operation in defence from the four older dominions than ever before. Certainly this

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38. COS(50)91st Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/32.

39. COS(50)100th Mtg, Min 3, 30 June 1950, Ibid.

co-operation still fell far short of the level desired by Britain, but the trend towards greater co-operation was still favourable. Whether the mud that had so far been the result of British efforts for greater defence co-operation could be fired into bricks or would yet ooze away shapeless and amorphous remained to be seen.

#### Commonwealth Defence and the New Dominions

Unlike the fluid state that characterized British policy towards the old dominions, British policy towards the new dominions in South Asia, which had been fluid since the end of the war, congealed in the last year before the outbreak of the Korean War. Hints of a new strategy towards South Asia had begun to emerge early in 1949 in a number of JPS documents.<sup>40</sup> The growing possibility of a communist China had shaken British strategic assumptions in the Far East. In April 1949 Communist China became a reality. In August 1949 the Chiefs of Staff formally adopted the strategy that had previously been hinted at.

On 16 August 1949 the JPS had completed a paper entitled "The Place of India and Pakistan in Allied Strategy".<sup>41</sup> The essence of the new paper as stated by Sir John Edelsten, the Vice Chief of the Naval Staff, was that "the best policy for India and Pakistan would be to remain as benevolent neutrals to the Allies". Slim countered, "that although the reasoning of the Paper suggested that if India and

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40. See pp. 257-9 above.

41. JP(49)67(Final), withheld in both DEFE 4/23 and DEFE 6/9.

Pakistan did not remain neutral we should have to send forces, he was not sure that this would actually prove correct in practice". The potential need to send forces was only one of the reasons for this change in strategy. The amendments to the report made by the Chiefs of Staff point out the critical shift in traditional imperial strategy caused by the continued advance of airpower and of strategic co-operation with the United States:

3. Short Term For the next two or three years at least, the strategic air offensive would be mainly an American responsibility. We understand that the United States Air Force plan to use B29 and B50 medium bombers from the United Kingdom, Egypt and Okinawa, and B36 heavy bombers from Maine staging through Alaska and the North-East Atlantic area. We also understand that the number of U.S. bombers which will shortly be available will have sufficient radius of action to allow all the proposed targets to be attacked within the first weeks of war.

4. Long Term In the long term, it is likely that the strategic air offensive would be carried out by high performance British and American jet bombers; the U.S. turbo-prop bombers are expected to have sufficient range to enable all targets to be reached from bases in the United Kingdom, Middle East and Okinawa.

5. It will not therefore be essential, whether in the short term or the long term, to use airfields in the Indian sub-continent in order to reach the required targets.<sup>42</sup>

The role of airpower that had been the central argument on the importance of the Middle East in the initial postwar debate between Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff, had now also put paid to the military importance of the former Raj. The importance of South Asia in British global strategy had now become almost entirely political. The Chiefs of Staff unanimously endorsed the position that, whatever might be the

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42. COS(49)123rd Mtg, Min 5, 24 August 1949, Annex I, Amendments to JP(49)67(F), DEFE 4/23. The comments by the Chiefs of Staff quoted above are from the actual meeting.

best policy for these two dominions to adopt in war, their open alignment with the West was of predominate importance to help check the spread of communism in Asia.

The approval of JP(49)67 by the Chiefs of Staff marks another milestone in the evolution of the strategy that underpinned and shaped postwar Commonwealth defence. From their initial postwar assessment of the strategic importance of the region, the Chiefs of Staff had argued that the most important element was political. It will be recalled they had instructed the India Office in March 1946 ". . . we cannot afford to allow the negotiations to break down and cannot therefore classify any of our needs as essential, if by this is meant that we would rather abandon the negotiations than modify our requirements".<sup>43</sup> We have also seen that in the final months before Indian independence, the Chiefs of Staff had become extremely concerned at the possible loss of military facilities in South Asia. For two years since independence, the Chiefs of Staff had played a waiting game in the hope of establishing military co-operation with India and Pakistan for British strategic ends. Now in August 1949 emergence of Communist China coupled with the evolution of airpower and strategic co-operation with the United States brought together what was politically and strategically desirable with what was politically possible. In terms of grand strategy, a democratic India in the Commonwealth could once again play its role as the bulwark of Commonwealth defence in the Far East even without direct military co-operation.

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43. See p. 47 above.



Another factor in the shift in British strategy in South Asia was the successful co-operation that had been established with Ceylon under the defence agreement of 11 November 1947. By 1949, Ceylon had proved adequate for essential Commonwealth air and sea communications, as well as telecommunication links, in the Indian Ocean. The Chiefs of Staff carefully cultivated Britain's strategic relationship with Ceylon. Slim made a personal visit to the Prime Minister of Ceylon to discuss defence issues during a trip to the Far East in November 1949.

The old issue of the admission of students from the South Asian dominions to British staff colleges was also successfully resolved. After repeated consideration by the Chiefs of Staff, they forwarded a recommendation in favour of the attendance of students from the new dominions at British joint service schools.<sup>44</sup> Their recommendation was duly approved by ministers at the Defence Committee meeting on 7 December 1949.<sup>45</sup> The issue of the security of American classified information remained a problem. On 9 December the Chiefs of Staff noted:

At the meeting of the Defence Committee two days previously attention had been drawn to the importance of telling the Americans that students from these new Commonwealth countries would be attending the Imperial Defence College before the American students arrived, and reported the fact themselves. It was important that this information should be conveyed to the Americans in exactly the right way and with the right amount of emphasis on the security aspect.<sup>46</sup>

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44. COS(49)172nd Mtg, Min 1, 18 November 1949, DEFE 4/26.

45. DO(49)23rd Mtg, Min 3, CAB 131/8.

46. COS(49)183rd Mtg, Min 5, DEFE 4/27.

Despite the problems with handling U.S. classified information, this issue had finally been resolved in favour of Commonwealth solidarity. In fact, in January 1950 as we shall see shortly, a new agreement on the exchange of classified material was to be negotiated with the United States which would finally lay this issue to rest.

In the year before the Korean War, the only major unresolved problem confronting British strategists in South Asia was the threat of war between India and Pakistan. Such a war would have dire consequences both for the integrity of the Commonwealth and for British global strategy. The Chiefs of Staff were so concerned over this threat that they took the initiative in March 1950 of drafting proposals for submission to both the Prime Minister and the British High Commissioner in India. In these proposals the Chiefs of Staff argued that Britain should take a hard line announcing that in the event of war between the two countries it reserved the right to make its own determination as to who was the aggressor and would then cut off all support from that country while continuing to support the other.<sup>47</sup> These proposals were rejected by ministers for a number of reasons among which was the fear that any such declaration would only succeed in driving India out of the Commonwealth. The JPS had also prepared a report on this topic at the instigation of the Chiefs of Staff and reached largely the same conclusion as ministers. The JPS argued that in all probability it would be very difficult to determine who was the aggressor and that while Britain could probably cripple Pakistan by withdrawing support, there was little likelihood of

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47. COS(50)51st Mtg, Confidential Annex, 27 March 1950, DEFE 4/30. The entire meeting dealt only with this issue.

British action having any drastic impact upon India in the event that that country was bent upon attacking Pakistan.<sup>48</sup>

The issue continued to simmer, however, and came before the Defence Committee on 19 May 1950. The committee reaffirmed Britain's previous policy that in the event of war between the two countries, British officers seconded to them would be ordered to stand-down.<sup>49</sup> The Chiefs of Staff also continued to address this issue without arriving at any concrete plans.<sup>50</sup>

Aside from this one very difficult issue, Britain's position in South Asia was far from unfavourable at the outbreak of the Korean War. India, Pakistan and Ceylon were all members of the Commonwealth. The great advantage of this relationship was the flexibility that it offered. A position of benevolent neutrality might serve the interests of both India and Britain in the short run, and did not foreclose the possibility of a more overt alliance at a later date. The Chiefs of Staff continued to hold Pakistan at arms length in the last year before the Korean war because they considered the benefits of a closer relationship in the short term to be outweighed by the costs. Until India and Pakistan resolved the dispute over Kashmir close military ties with either country might alienate the other. At

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48. JP(50)25(Final) considered at COS(50)52nd Mtg, Min 2, 29 March 1950, Ibid.

49. DO(50)9th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/8.

50. COS(50)84th Mtg, Min 6, 7 June 1950, DEFE 4/32. The report requested by the Chiefs of Staff at this meeting, JP(50)75 "Measures to be taken in the Event of War between India and Pakistan", was not completed until 21 November 1950, DEFE 6/13.

the same time economic and political ties with the new dominions served both to preserve British interests in the Far East and to serve as a viable model for the evolution of the British empire into a less formal and less costly pattern that could still serve British global interests.

#### Binding the Colonial Empire

While the example of the new South Asian dominions might serve as a useful example for the constitutional evolution of the rest of the dependent empire, British global strategists faced the immediate need of binding the colonial empire firmly into Commonwealth defence as the tensions of the cold war continued to mount. The most important issue continued to be the raising of colonial forces.

The results of the appraisals of colonial force levels that had been set in motion by GEN 264 in December 1948 came before the Defence Committee on 1 July 1949. The committee had before them a paper prepared by the Chiefs of Staff listing the forces they proposed for the colonies and the cost of those forces.<sup>51</sup> The problem once again was one of financing these forces. The Colonial Office estimated that the amount the colonies themselves could pay would be less than twenty percent of the cost required to raise the forces envisaged by the Chiefs of Staff. Creech Jones did not dispute the size of the forces proposed by the Chiefs of Staff saying that he would do his utmost to ensure that the colonies paid as much of the cost as they could possibly afford. The opposition now came from Sir Stafford Cripps,

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51. DO(49)44, CAB 131/7.

the Chancellor of the Exchequer. He contended that it was wrong for the Chiefs of Staff to set force levels for the colonies in the first place. He argued that the level of forces should be proposed by the colonial governments who would also have to face the problem of paying for them. This argument was countered by both Creech Jones and Alexander who explained that the colonial governments had been consulted in the preparations of all of the figures shown in the report. "The ultimate responsibility for the defence of the Colonies lay with the Secretary of State for the Colonies, who surely must turn to the Chiefs of Staff for final advice on a matter such as this?"<sup>52</sup> The committee deferred making a decision until after the Chancellor of the Exchequer and the Minister of Defence and Service Ministers had had a chance to discuss the principle involved.

At the next meeting of the Defence Committee this issue was the first item on the agenda. The committee endorsed the force levels specified by the Chiefs of Staff as required for internal security in the colonies and agreed that representatives from the principal colonies would be summoned to London as soon as possible in the hope of getting greater contributions from the colonial governments towards the cost of overall defence.<sup>53</sup>

As a result of this decision, on 20 August Creech Jones sent despatches to the colonial governments in Africa calling for a conference at the end of September on African defence forces.<sup>54</sup>

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52. DO(49)17th Mtg Min 6, CAB 131/8.

53. DO(49)18th Mtg, Min 1, Ibid.

54. Despatches from the Secretary of State for the Colonies to Colonial Governments of East and West Africa, Item 1, DEFE 10/1.

Delays in co-ordination meant that the actual conference did not take place until 9 November.<sup>55</sup> The Conference lasted until 18 November and the results were not presented to the Defence Committee until 23 January 1950.

Prior to this Defence Committee meeting, on 18 January the Chiefs of Staff discussed these results. Slim's comment that the issue was not whether or not the forces were required, but still who would pay illustrates that little had changed since the Defence Committee meetings the previous July. The Chiefs of Staff were informed that Attlee had again drafted a memo for Alexander urging greater use of colonial forces to ease Britain's global commitments.<sup>56</sup> Thus Attlee continued to push an issue that he had first raised in January 1946.<sup>57</sup>

A partial solution did emerge from the Defence Committee consideration of Creech Jones's report on the African Forces Conference. As Creech Jones reported:

Apart from the Treasury representatives' dissent, there was unanimous agreement at the Conference that the scale of forces laid down by the Chiefs of Staff as necessary for internal security in West Africa (i.e., approximately the scale of forces at present in existence), was irreducible, unless risks are taken in the political and security field, which, in my opinion, we cannot contemplate.<sup>58</sup>

The central issue then was not the level of the forces, but who should

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55. Records of the Conference can be found in DEFE 10/1.

56. COS(50)11th Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/28.

57. See p. 119 above.

58. DO(50)3, CAB 131/9

pay the estimated £1,200,000 between the cost of these forces and the amount that the colonial governments could raise.<sup>59</sup> Attlee took the initiative recommending that the decision made at GEN 264 in December 1948 that these excess costs should be borne on the Colonial and Middle Eastern Services Vote should be approved with respect to West Africa. The committee endorsed this suggestion. With respect to East Africa and Central Africa the Conference's findings were not quite so simple. For these two regions the level of forces stipulated by the Chiefs of Staff had been approved, but there had also been agreement on the need to reduce the scale of headquarters and administrative backing for these forces. Creech Jones's recommendation that this issue of headquarters should be examined further was also endorsed by the committee.<sup>60</sup>

On 5 May 1950, the Chiefs of Staff addressed the issue of colonial forces once more. Once again the stimulus for this consideration had been Attlee. In a memorandum he raised the possibility of making greater use of colonial forces in fighting the cold war.<sup>61</sup> Attlee suggested that it might be possible to employ colonial forces as a strategic reserve. In a reply to Attlee's minute, the War Office used the same arguments that they had used since 1946, namely that colonial forces were less capable than British

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59. Brief for PM for DO(50)2nd Mtg, Min 3, PREM 8/1340.

60. DO(50))2nd Mtg, Min 2, CAB 131/8. The issue of East and Central African forces and headquarters was addressed at a conference in Nairobi in October 1950 and brought before the Defence Committee in April 1951, see PREM 8/1340.

61. COS(50)140, DEFE 5/20.

forces as there were limits to the situations in which they might be used and that they were not significantly cheaper. The Chiefs of Staff endorsed the War Office view while stipulating that the War Office memorandum be expanded in order to be convincing to ministers.<sup>62</sup>

Thus the Chiefs of Staff and Attlee remained at odds throughout the period from the end of the Second World War until Korea over the possibility of making greater use of colonial forces. As a politician it appears that Attlee's intuition told him that there should be some way to achieve a greater commitment from the colonial empire to Commonwealth defence. He continued to push this issue to the fore despite continued rejection by his service advisers. From the service point of view it is noteworthy that the answer given to Attlee continued to be the same despite being made under three different Chiefs of the Imperial General Staff, three different First Sea Lords and two different Chiefs of the Air Staff. While the services remained consistent in their inability to find a means for making use of colonial forces on any significant scale, this inability reflects a real weakness in postwar Commonwealth defence. Without finding a way to use colonial forces to share in the burden of protecting the British world system, the dependent empire remained a burden rather than an asset. It provided little more than strategic bases around the world that Britain no longer had the strength to garrison. While Attlee's continued pursuit of this issue indicates that he saw the basic contradiction involved, the situation remained unresolved and a

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62. COS(50)71st Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/31.



source of continued weakness in postwar Commonwealth defence.

The burdens created by the colonial empire were all too obvious in the last year before the Korean War. The defence of Hong Kong and the emergency in Malaya placed a tremendous burden on Britain's stretched resources. Throughout the latter half of 1949, the Chiefs of Staff closely monitored the situation in both colonies. As already mentioned, reinforcements sent to these two colonies had made it impossible to meet British global planning commitments for the defence of the Middle East. British weakness in the Middle East had forced British policy makers to seek greater support from other members of the Commonwealth. The same held true for their increased commitments in the Far East. We have already seen the Chiefs' of Staff attempt to obtain Australian co-operation in in Malaya. In response to a British enquiry, New Zealand had offered three frigates and a flight of Dakotas for the defence of Hong Kong.<sup>63</sup>

The defence burdens created by these two colonies had forced British strategy to pay greater attention to the Far East. The impact of the Far Eastern colonies on British strategy can be seen in relation to Britain's defence policy as enunciated in DO(47)44. In that document almost no attention had been paid to the Far East. In 1947, the Chiefs of Staff had considered that the threat in the Far East was slight and that the development of any threat in the Pacific would automatically be countered by the United States. Now because of British colonial commitments and the evolution of the cold war, the Far East was no longer a theatre of marginal interest for the Chiefs

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63. JP(49)97(Final), 14 September 1949, DEFE 6/10.

of Staff. British commitments in the Far East were directly influencing Britain's ability to maintain commitments in other parts of the world, particularly the Middle East. Global commitments increased the need for British strategists to maintain the closest possible co-operation with the United States.

#### Anglo/American Planning

The establishment of NATO, however, brought new uncertainty about the future of Anglo/American global co-operation. Once again the issue of disbanding the Combined Chiefs of Staff that the British Chiefs of Staff had resisted since September 1945 became an issue. On 20 April 1949 the Chiefs of Staff considered the issue of setting up machinery for the Atlantic Pact particularly in reference to the Americans and the French. They had agreed:

. . . that it would be unwise to abandon the substance of our relations under the Combined Chiefs of Staff organisation for the shadow of anything that might be achieved from the Atlantic pact machinery without at least finding out what the American Chiefs of Staff thought about it. . . . Meanwhile, no reference to the Combined Chiefs of Staff need be made in making proposals for the Atlantic Pact machinery.<sup>64</sup>

The British Chiefs of Staff remained as committed as ever to the Combined Chiefs of Staff as a means of Anglo/American liaison.

British persistence on this issue bore fruit in August 1949. On 3 August 1949, the first meeting of the full Combined Chiefs of Staff since Potsdam took place in London. The first item on the agenda was the future of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The committee agreed:

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64. COS(49)57th Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/21.

(i) that in reply to any questions, it should be stated that the future of the Combined Chiefs of Staff had not been discussed at the present meeting for the reason that the Combined Chiefs of Staff was no longer functioning except in connection with Trieste and other residual problems.

(ii) that the existing machinery of the Combined Chiefs of Staff should be preserved in fact if not in name.<sup>65</sup>

The British Joint Staff Mission in consultation with the U.S. Chiefs of Staff were tasked with examining ways in which item (ii) might be accomplished. Military leaders on both sides of the Atlantic still supported preserving the capabilities that the Combined Chiefs of Staff machinery afforded.

To further define the relationship between the Combined Chiefs of Staff, NATO and existing Anglo/American plans, the JPS produced a report entitled "Command Organisation for War in 1951".<sup>66</sup> The report recommended that Allied higher command in war should comprise the American and British Chiefs of Staff with possible French participation. In considering the report, the Chiefs of Staff came down strongly in favour of excluding the French. Allied command should be strictly an Anglo/American affair, but all discussion of this matter must be done strictly privately with the Americans and should not be on the agenda of the A.B.C. discussions.<sup>67</sup>

The seeming accord from the 3 August meeting over the need to preserve the Combined Chiefs of Staff, however, was short lived. The British Chiefs of Staff received a warning of what was in the offing

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65. COS(49)113th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/23.

66. JP(49)93(Final), 5 September 1949, DEFE 6/10.

67. COS(49)131st Mtg, Min 10, 8 September 1949, DEFE 4/24.

in late September just prior to the commencement of the next round of A.B.C. planning discussions. On 23 September the Chiefs of Staff learned that American planners had asked British planners to help them draft a statement announcing the dissolution of the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The British response had been to ask the Americans to delay taking any formal action on this issue until after Tedder had had a chance to discuss it with the American Chiefs of Staff on 5 October.<sup>68</sup> However, a statement by an American official from the Department of Defense in answer to a question at a press conference publicly terminated the Combined Chiefs of Staff. The British Joint Service Mission would be moving out of the Pentagon making co-ordination with the Americans more difficult.<sup>69</sup>

Anglo/American global planning had never been a simple affair, but the dissolution of the Combined Chiefs of Staff added new complications. Slim travelled to Washington in late November. On 8 December the Chiefs of Staff considered a report by Slim on his trip, but the report was considered too sensitive to file with the normal Chiefs of Staff records.<sup>70</sup> At a meeting on 9 January with Lieutenant General Sir William Morgan of the B.J.S.M. in Washington, the Chiefs of Staff fretted that since the dissolution of the Combined Chiefs of Staff relations with the Americans were no longer close. "SIR WILLIAM SLIM said that the recent decision of the United States Joint Chiefs of Staff 'that in view of the North Atlantic Treaty planning now being

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68. COS(49)140th Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/24.

69. JP(49)133(Final), DEFE 6/11.

70. COS(49)182nd Mtg, Min 3, DEFE 4/27. The minutes were filed in the Secretary's Standard File and are not open to public inspection.

undertaken, further U.S., U.K. and Canadian conferences were considered inadvisable', seemed to be out of step with previous decisions". Slim added that collaboration with the United States was essential in many areas outside the North Atlantic region. Morgan tried to reassure the Chiefs of Staff saying that he understood that the Combined Chiefs of Staff would be resurrected in the event of war. He also agreed to address the issue of the A.B.C. planners with the American Chiefs of Staff at the earliest opportunity.<sup>71</sup>

The importance that the British attached to maintaining their collaboration with the Americans on as intimate a basis as possible is reflected in the fact that Tedder was called out of retirement to be Head of the B.J.S.M. in April 1950. He had stepped down as the Chief of the Air Staff on 31 December 1949. His stature was such that could be considered Britain's senior military adviser. He had been Chairman of the British Chiefs of Staff Committee from July 1946 until his retirement. He seemed to be the ideal man to represent the British Chiefs of Staff in Washington. He had a good reputation with the Americans. He had served as Eisenhower's Deputy Supreme Commander in Northwest Europe and had staunchly supported Eisenhower against the criticism of many of his own countrymen. He was on good personal terms with General Bradley, the Chairman of the American Joint Chiefs of Staff. Nor did the Chiefs of Staff leave any room for doubt about his duties as Head of the B.J.S.M. On 15 March, they had personally screened the directive that Tedder was to be given upon assuming his new post.<sup>72</sup>

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71. COS(50)5th Mtg, Min 3, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/28.

72. COS(50)42nd Mtg, Min 5, DEFE 4/29.

Even before Tedder brought his personal stature and talents to the task of maintaining Anglo/American defence collaboration, however, the Chiefs of Staff had scored an important breakthrough. The problem of handling American classified information had bedevilled British military leaders since the end of the war. It had complicated British relations with the new dominions in South Asia, it had complicated planning with the old dominions and most recently it had complicated British planning with Western European allies. After receiving assurances in May 1949 that the new American Secretary of Defense would look into this issue it appears that nothing further had happened. A.V. Alexander had raised the issue when he had been in Washington, but also without tangible results.<sup>73</sup>

With no apparent solution in sight, the British Chiefs of Staff decided to take the initiative. On 8 December they decided to send a special delegation to Washington to address solely this issue.<sup>74</sup> To head the team they selected Lieutenant General Gerald Templer, the VCIGS. On 4 January, the Chiefs of Staff discussed the strategy to adopt in the discussions with the members of the delegation. Templer said that his strategy would be to try to get the Americans to agree that Commonwealth countries should not be regarded as third parties.<sup>75</sup> On 9 January the Defence Committee approved the U.K. delegation's departure.<sup>76</sup>

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73. COS(49)158th Mtg, Min 1(c), 26 October 1949, DEFE 4/25.

74. COS(49)182nd Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/27.

75. COS(50)2nd Mtg, Min 5, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/28.

76. DO(50)1st Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/8.

The mission was an unqualified success. The United States recognized "the special needs of the U.K. with respect to the other nations comprising the British Commonwealth". Britain was given full discretion to release certain forms of classified information to other Commonwealth countries such as intelligence, technical and tactical doctrine, and production. In other areas such as research and development, and strategic planning, a working party would decide on what material was releasable.<sup>77</sup> The Chiefs of Staff discussion of the agreement with Templer and his delegation on their return has been withheld.<sup>78</sup> However, at their meeting on 17 February, the Vice Chiefs of Staff were informed that Attlee and the "other Ministers concerned" had approved the agreement reached by the Templer delegation. Approval by the Defence Committee was not required, but they would be informed after the General Election. As the Minister of Defence had received a letter from the U.S. Secretary of Defence reporting the approval of the United States, the agreements could now be considered to be in force.<sup>79</sup> At the Defence Committee meeting on 5 April, Attlee personally congratulated Templer on the success of his mission.<sup>80</sup> Field Marshal Templer composing notes on his life in 1975 recorded with pride, ". . . the Burns-Templer Agreement was signed, and proved

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77. COS(50)36, 31 January 1950, DEFE 5/19.

78. COS(50)23rd Mtg, Min 3, 8 February 1950, DEFE 4/29.

79. COS(50)28th Mtg, Min 5, Ibid.

80. DO(50)5th Mtg, Min 2, CAB 131/8. DO(50)19 which contains the text of the agreement was circulated at that meeting and is withheld in CAB 131/9. The text is available, however, in COS(50)36 cited above.

of great benefit to us -- and I hope and believe also to the Americans. I believe it still rides".<sup>81</sup> The success of the Templer mission had succeeded in removing an obstacle that had fettered both Anglo/American relations and British relations within the Commonwealth. Both relationships were now covered by definite guidelines. Commonwealth defence in the broadest sense of the term had been given a helpful boost forward.

The tale of Anglo/American strategic planning in the last year before the Korean War had neither such a straightforward nor successful outcome. In the previous chapter we left the Chiefs of Staff still trying to determine the nature of their short term commitment to the defence of Europe. They hoped that by gaining details of the American commitment to Western Europe they would be able to more easily sort out their own strategy.

While the discussion of strategy and plans at the meeting of the British and American Chiefs of Staff on 3 August has been withheld from public inspection in the Public Records Office, it is possible to glean the content of them from subsequent discussion.<sup>82</sup> The American Chiefs of Staff had presented their strategic concept for war in 1950/51. As a result, the British Chiefs of Staff instructed the JPS to prepare an evaluation of this strategic concept. The JPS report left no doubt as to their attitude to the American concept:

(a) The American strategic concept is not sound militarily since land forces, and in part their air forces, are

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81. John Cloake, Templer: Tiger of Malaya, (London, 1985) p. 180.

82. COS(49)113th Mtg, Min 3, withheld, DEFE 4/23.



unlikely to be effectively engaged during the first vital six months. . . .

(b) Under the American strategic concept the British Empire and Commonwealth will be unable to attain the three objects of the British defence policy (defence of the United Kingdom, control of sea communications and a firm hold of the Middle East) unless part of the United States strategic air force is employed tactically in defending the Middle East and unless part of the United States naval air force is employed to keep control of the Middle East communications. Even with this United States air support our hold on the Middle East will be precarious.<sup>83</sup>

The American concept called for attempting at all cost to hold a bridgehead in Europe to avoid another operation on the scale of the Normandy invasion to liberate Europe. American plans envisaged holding the line of the Pyrenees and if this was not possible holding a line farther south in Spain. The bridgehead would be supported from a base of operations established in North Africa. Aside from British reservations about the political and military weaknesses of this concept, it posed a direct threat to Commonwealth defence. "The United States Chiefs of Staff thought that it was more important to hold a Bridgehead in Europe than to defend the Middle East".<sup>84</sup> In discussing the JPS report the Chiefs of Staff reaffirmed:

. . . their view that the defence of the Middle East was a fundamental requirement of British Commonwealth strategy. It was emphasised that the Middle East air base was of immense importance and it was certain that, without its use, the full effect of the strategic air offensive against Russia would not be obtained. Furthermore, the oil resources of the Middle East were assuming ever increasing importance and, before long, would probably be essential to the Allied war effort.<sup>85</sup>

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83. JP(49)85(Final), 5 September 1949, DEFE 6/9.

84. COS(49)131st Mtg, Min 8, Confidential Annex, 8 September 1949, DEFE 4/24.

85. Ibid.

In an attempt to find some common ground with the United States, the JPS proposed a compromise short term plan. Under this plan Britain and the Commonwealth would be responsible for the defence of the Middle East, the United States would be responsible for the defence of Europe, the United Kingdom would provide three quarters of the naval forces to control the North Atlantic, the United States would be responsible for providing naval forces for the rest of the Atlantic, the Pacific and the Mediterranean [except for close support of British convoys in the Mediterranean and the flank force in the Middle East], the United States would use three quarters of its strategic air force against strategic targets in Russia with the remainder to be used to support the defence of Western Europe and the Middle East, the RAF would be used for the security of the United Kingdom and the Middle East, British and American forces of occupation in Germany would be assigned to operations in Western Europe, Australia and New Zealand would be responsible for South East Asia, Canadian forces would be deployed in the United Kingdom and the North Atlantic, one American regimental combat team would be deployed to Israel to encourage that country's co-operation, and American and Canadian forces that became available after D + 6 months would form the strategic reserve for use as directed by the Combined Chiefs of Staff.<sup>86</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff raised only two objections to these proposals. Tedder and Slim felt that economic stringency would prevent Britain from providing three quarters of the naval forces

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86. JP(49)85(Final), DEFE 6/9.

required for the North Atlantic. They were informed that this proposal was a ploy to get America to assume primary responsibility in the Mediterranean and thus make a greater commitment to the defence of the Middle East. As a result, "The Committee agreed that we should do everything possible to commit the Americans to the Mediterranean/Middle East but that at the same time we should press for the maximum American contribution for the Atlantic". Their second objection concerned the defence of South East Asia. Rather than allocating this responsibility to Australia and New Zealand, they deemed it more appropriate for Anglo/American planning to designate this region as a British Commonwealth responsibility. With these modifications, the proposals were approved as a guide for the planning talks scheduled with the Americans and the Canadians later that month.<sup>87</sup>

This compromise short term strategic concept clearly shows the interlocking relationship between Commonwealth defence and strategic planning with the United States. Maintenance of Britain's position as a global power required harmonizing the plans of both the United States and the old dominions in the short term. In September 1949 such harmony seemed to be within Britain's grasp if British strategists played their cards skillfully.

The A.B.C. planners met in Washington between 26 September and 4 October 1949. This meeting was followed on 5 October by a meeting of the American Chiefs of Staff with Tedder and Elliot. The results of these meetings were mixed, but on the whole they were a disappointment

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87. COS(49)131st Mtg, Min 8, DEFE 4/24.

particularly with respect to the short term emergency plan. American planners had been given firm guidance by the American Chiefs of Staff which meant that they could not discuss all issues freely. Basic differences in the strategic views of the two countries remained unresolved.<sup>88</sup> American planners rejected all of the British planners proposals for the Middle East. They were unwilling to send token forces to Israel, to have an American Supreme Commander for the region or to agree to the stationing of American strategic bombers in the region.<sup>89</sup> This last point must have been extremely painful as since April 1946 the Chiefs of Staff had defended the British position in the Middle East on the grounds of providing bases for U.S. strategic bombers. Tedder and Elliot had some success in getting the American Chiefs of Staff to consider holding the Rhine rather than withdrawing to a bridgehead in the event of war in Europe, but like the planners had little success in winning American support from the British position in the Middle East. In fact, the American Chiefs of Staff went so far as to say that they could not agree that Britain should send reinforcements to the Middle East if those forces were required for the defence of Western Europe.<sup>90</sup>

As a result of the talks a new emergency plan had been produced with the British code name "Galloper" and the American code name "Offtackle". Anglo/American differences, however, made the plan

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88. COS(49)154th Mtg, Min 5, Confidential Annex, 19 October 1949, DEFE 4/25.

89. JP(49)126(Final), Annex I, 2 November 1949, DEFE 6/10.

90. The minutes of this meeting can be found in COS(49)344, DEFE 5/17.

virtually unworkable. The JPS attempts to cobble together a viable plan took until 1 March 1950.<sup>91</sup> When the Vice Chiefs of Staff considered this report on 24 March, they gave the report their approval primarily to stay in step with the Americans who had already approved and circulated Offtackle. They agreed that it was likely the plan would have to be revised as a result of a new British long term strategic concept then being worked out.<sup>92</sup> The problems created by the American strategic concept was one of a number of factors that had led the Chiefs of Staff to call for a complete reappraisal of British defence policy.

Since June 1947 DO(47)44 had been the bedrock of all British strategic planning. British strategy had been slightly modified in the debates over a continental commitment launched by Montgomery in early 1948. At that point it will be recalled that an ambiguous policy of holding the Russians as far east as possible without specifying whether that meant the Rhine or the Channel had been agreed. Aside from that modification, British defence strategy had remained largely unchanged.

Prior to their meeting with the American Chiefs of Staff on 3 August 1949, the Chiefs of Staff on 6 July had again considered the report prepared for them nine months earlier on "Overall Strategic Concept for War in 1957". Their deliberations at this meeting have been withheld, but the report that resulted from these deliberations

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91. JP(49)134(Final), DEFE 6/11.

92. COS(50)49th Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/30.

is available.<sup>93</sup>

This report is important because it establishes the position of British long term strategy prior to their meeting with the American Chiefs of Staff. The report reflects both an essential continuity and a refinement of the strategy endorsed in DO(47)44. The report assumed that the Russian political aim was to dominate the world. The Allied political aim was to prevent Russian aggression and preserve world peace. The Soviet regime was seen as inveterately hostile to the West and the report assumed that the Soviets would never settle for peaceful coexistence except as a temporary tactical ploy. In such circumstances war some time after 1957 was highly probable. To attempt to defeat the Soviet Union and its satellites with land forces would be playing to Soviet strength. A maritime strategy was impossible because the Soviets would be economically self-sufficient. "Air Strategy appears to be the only military means of achieving the Allied war aim". Because the goal would be as rapid an end of the war as possible, the political goal would be a negotiated settlement rather than unconditional surrender. The settlement must allow the Russian people to freely choose their own government and it was hoped that this would mean the removal of the communist regime. It was essential not to invade the Soviet Union with land forces as this would rally the Russian people to the Soviet Government. It was essential that the greatest possible blow be struck at the outset. Without categorically mandating their use, the report implied that the level of dislocation required to achieve the Allied strategy could

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93. COS(49)97th Mtg, Min 3, withheld, JP(48)59(Second Revise) dated 20 July 1949 available, both DEFE 4/22.

only be achieved by using atomic weapons. The bases for the strategic air offensive would be the United Kingdom, the Middle East and the Japanese islands. With respect to the bases in the Middle East, "It is probable that the Egyptian air bases will be supplemented by bases in Cyrenaica, Aden and possibly the Sudan". The report also mentioned the possibility of U.S. long range bombers using bases in Maine and Alaska. Areas to be defended by the allies included the bases for the air offensive and the main support areas which included the United States and Canada, parts of South America, parts of Africa, and Australia and New Zealand. The defence of Africa was to be conducted from the Middle East. Vital sea communications included the North Atlantic, the Mediterranean including the flank of the army operating in the Middle East and the Pacific between North America and Japan.

The essence of this strategy was the achievement of a quick knock out blow while insuring that the bases and communications to deliver this blow were protected. While it is infinitely debatable whether such a strategy had any probability of success or was merely a fantasy, it reflects a continuity with Britain's historic preference for avoiding a continental strategy. Just when an enemy appeared who was invulnerable to a traditional maritime strategy, a<sup>r</sup>power seemed to offer a solution. The Chiefs of Staff had clung tenaciously to this position since the initial row with Attlee over the Middle East immediately after the war. In Britain's weakened condition following the war and faced with a continental power of greater strength than ever before, no other strategy would have afforded Britain the ability to maintain at least some degree of partnership with the United States. Design work on Britain's first generation of jet bombers, the

V-bombers, had commenced in 1946. While it was assumed that the Americans would provide the bulk of the bomber forces, Britain would at least be able to provide a significant share. British sensitivity over this issue can be seen in the response of Air Marshal Sir Arthur Sanders, the Vice Chief of the Air Staff, to the American strategic concept prepared for the NATO Standing Group in October 1949. "He considered that there was a risk that the French would use the statement that atomic bombing would be primarily an American responsibility as an argument that the British Strategic Air Force should be scrapped and that the United Kingdom should concentrate instead on Tactical Air and Land Forces".<sup>94</sup> In an air strategy, Britain's position could also be enhanced by providing the vital air bases in the United Kingdom and hopefully those in the Middle East.

The discussions with the American Chiefs of Staff on 3 August had upset the British strategic applection. Although that discussion had dealt with emergency short term plans, the American short term concept was ominously out of sync with British long term plans. If American short term plans called for a withdrawal from the Middle East in 1950/51 it would seem likely that the Americans would be no more willing to commit themselves to that region in 1956/7. British strategists received another jolt with the Soviet explosion of a nuclear device in July 1949. From the Chiefs of Staff records it is not apparent when they became aware of this, but President Truman's announcement on 22 September informed the world. British planners had been working on the assumption that the Soviets would not have the

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94. COS(49)151st Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, 10 October 1949, DEFE 4/25.



bomb before 1952. Thus three years had suddenly been lopped off their strategic calculations further blurring the distinction between long and short term planning.

Against this background, British planners met the American planners in late September not only to revise their emergency war plans, but also to try to synchronize their long term strategy. Previously, the Americans had not been prepared to discuss long term strategy. On this occasion, however, the Americans presented their British counterparts with "a massive document of 172 pages". British planners noted, "It was very satisfactory to find that the broad American ideas in the first phases of a long range war do not differ materially from our own; in fact, some verbatim extracts from Joint Planning papers have been incorporated in the American paper". With regard to American plan for bringing the war to a conclusion, British planners were less pleased, "as it included a campaign across Europe in the third year of the war by forces of the order of 150 Allied divisions, followed by an occupation of Russia after her surrender by a force of some 27 Allied divisions and 5 Allied Tactical air forces".<sup>95</sup> Clearly, both American long and short range plans raised fundamental questions about Britain's own overall strategic concept that now needed to be ironed out.

#### Evolution of a New Global Strategy

The Vice Chiefs of Staff addressed this problem when they considered a telegram from Air Marshall Elliot in Washington outlining

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95. JP(49)133(Final), 14 October 1949, DEFE 6/11.

the American strategic concept on 10 October 1949. The VCIGS saw the issue quite clearly. It had been two and a half years since DO(47)44 laying down the basis for Commonwealth strategy had been approved by Ministers and much had changed since then. Western Union and then NATO had been created. Referring to DO(47)44 he said:

This report stated that the defence of the Middle East was a fundamental requirement of British strategy. In view of the present American attitude to the defence of the Middle East, it was important that we should have an up-to-date appreciation of British Commonwealth strategy which had been endorsed by Ministers.<sup>96</sup>

His proposal was approved by the other two Vice Chiefs. It was agreed that the JPS should revise DO(47)44 after there had been a chance to have a full discussion with the British planners and Tedder when they returned from Washington.

The meeting with British planners took place on 19 October. The central issue was determining the size of the British commitment to Western Europe and the resultant impact that commitment would have on Britain's ability to defend the Middle East.

This had become more important in view of the attitude of the United States Chiefs of Staff who, during the recent conference with Lord Tedder, had said that they were not completely in agreement that U.K. forces should be sent to the Middle East immediately on the outbreak of war when they were needed in Western Europe. On this basis it was more than ever important that we should know what contribution could be expected from the Commonwealth countries towards the defence of the Middle East. If we wanted to be sure of the presence of British forces in the Middle East at the outbreak of war it looked as if we must put them there in peacetime.<sup>97</sup>

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96. COS(49)151st Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, DFFE 4/25.

97. COS(49)154th Mtg, Min 5, Confidential Annex, Ibid.

The committee agreed that the three pillars of Commonwealth defence remained the same and that the defence of Western Europe should not be regarded as a separate pillar, but as part of the defence of the United Kingdom. On this basis the Chiefs of Staff instructed the JPS to revise DO(47)44.

At the same meeting the Chiefs of Staff discussed a "Brief for United Kingdom Planners in the North Atlantic Standing Group". The importance of this brief is the tension that it reflects between Commonwealth defence as previously conceived, NATO planning and planning with the United States. The report stated that as a result of Tedder's talks with the American Chiefs of Staff a compromise strategy had been agreed for Western Europe that called for attempting to hold the Rhine. If that was not possible, an attempt would be made to hold a bridgehead in France. If in turn that proved impossible, an attempt would be made to hold the line of the Pyrenees. If that line also could not be held, then a base for future operations would be established in North West Africa. The attempt to try to hold the Rhine, which both the American and British Chiefs of Staff deemed impossible in the short term, was a sop to the French. Attempting to hold the Rhine or a bridgehead in France were also British ploys to try to get the Americans to at least plan on sending forces to Europe rather than directly to North Africa. The contingencies of withdrawal to Spain and eventually North Africa were concessions to the Americans. If this strategy were adopted, however, "we should be unable to reinforce the Middle East with combat forces from the United Kingdom if either the Rhine or a bridgehead in France were still

holding out when reinforcements became available".<sup>98</sup> Rather than commit themselves to such a change in policy, the Chiefs of Staff advised the British representatives to the standing group to stall rather than make a commitment.<sup>99</sup> Clearly the advent of NATO in combination with the need to co-ordinate defence planning with the Americans had thrown Commonwealth defence into disarray. Once again the issue of a continental commitment would have to be addressed.

Slim brought the issue before his colleagues at their meeting on 14 November. He recommended that Britain now adopt a policy of promising to reinforce the continent with two divisions in the event of war. He said that it should be possible to mobilize four divisions in the first two months of war and he recommended that two be earmarked for the continent and two for the Middle East. He felt that because of the time delay in mobilizing these forces it would be possible to determine whether or not it was indeed militarily sound to send them and in the mean time the mere promise would help to strengthen the resolve of Britain's continental allies. The Chiefs of Staff agreed that "on military grounds a strong case could be made for promising now to send additional land forces to the Continent".<sup>100</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff discussed their recommendation to send reinforcements to the continent in the event of war with Alexander at a Staff Conference the next day.<sup>101</sup> When no action seemed to be

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98. JP(49)132(Final), 15 October 1949, DEFE 6/10.

99. COS(49)154th Mtg, Min 4, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/25.

100. COS(49)168th Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/26.

101. COS(49)169th Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, Ibid.

taking place on this issue, the Chiefs of Staff sent Alexander another report recommending reinforcing the continent on 21 December.<sup>102</sup>

The next move on the issue of a continental commitment came from quite a different quarter. Bevin had requested a new assessment of British strategic requirements in Egypt to use on his return trip from Colombo. He planned to stop in Egypt to try again to impart some political will into discussions for a new Anglo/Egyptian Treaty. When the Chiefs of Staff and Michael Wright of the Foreign Office considered the report produced by the JPS at a meeting on 16 January, they agreed that Bevin needed more room to manoeuvre than the report offered and it should be redrafted.<sup>103</sup> Two days later when the Chiefs of Staff again considered the JPS report, Slim put forward completely new proposals.<sup>104</sup> These proposals called for further reductions in British troop strengths in Egypt and a greater degree of Anglo/Egyptian defence co-operation. As an adjunct to these proposals, however, the War Office also proposed to reduce the British garrison in the Middle East from fifteen to eight battalions. Before submitting these proposals to the Defence Committee, the Chiefs of Staff took care at their meeting on 20 January to agree that the reduction in the Middle East garrison was not a change in strategy but only a redeployment of forces "partly within the area and partly in readiness in the United Kingdom".<sup>105</sup> By this sleight of hand and under

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102. COS(49)188th Mtg, Min 12, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/27.

103. JP(50)2(Final), DEFE 6/12, considered at COS(50)10th Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/28.

104. COS(50)11th Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, Ibid.

105. COS(50)12th Mtg, Min 5, Ibid.

the guise of new proposals for negotiations with Egypt, the Chiefs of Staff won the endorsement of the Defence Committee on 23 January for altered troops strengths in the Middle East.<sup>106</sup> No matter what disguise was pinned on this move, the net result was that the Middle East garrison was being reduced in favour of having reserves readily available in the United Kingdom. From the United Kingdom these reserves could reinforce Western Europe as well as the Middle East. This was a sharp turn around from the Chiefs' of Staff position only three months previous. Then they had argued, in light of the threat of the Americans opposing British reinforcements going to the Middle East after the outbreak of war, "If we wanted to be sure of the presence of British forces in the Middle East at the outbreak of war it looked as if we must put them there in peacetime".<sup>107</sup> It gives some measure of the degree to which the orientation of the Chiefs of Staff was shifting towards Western Europe.

The day after the Defence Committee endorsement of the Chiefs of Staff proposal to hold part of the reinforcements for the Middle East in the United Kingdom, the Chiefs of Staff returned to the issue of Britain's strategy with regard to the defence of Western Europe. The topic of discussion was a paper by the JPS on "Deployment of United Kingdom and Commonwealth Forces in the Event of War in the Short Term".<sup>108</sup> Slim again led the assault stating that "in his opinion it

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106. DO(50)2nd Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/8.

107. COS(49)154th Mtg, Min 5, Confidential Annex, 19 October 1949, DEFE 4/25.

108. JP(49)125, withheld, DEFE 6/10 and 4/28.

was quite wrong to refer to the defence of Western Europe as merely a desirable objective. It was of immense importance to the defence of the United Kingdom to hold the enemy in Western Europe". He still supported the three pillars of Commonwealth defence, but with reservations. The crux of the issue as he saw it was:

. . . while the defence of Western Europe was obviously of paramount importance it was not likely, in the period up to 1951 to be a practical proposition and that the deployment recommended in the paper had therefore been on the accepted three pillars of Commonwealth strategy.

One might infer from this statement that in Slim's mind the defence of Western Europe would eventually become a fourth pillar of British defence policy and possibly the most important. Both of the other Chiefs of Staff agreed with Slim's comments with only the First Sea Lord adding that "it was essential not to under-rate the strategic importance of the Middle East". Sir William Elliot reminded the Chiefs of Staff of the current official position of the British government:

. . . until very recently the Chiefs of Staff had always maintained that in the event of war in the next few years, it would be necessary to liberate Europe and that we could not prevent the enemy from advancing to the Channel in the early stages. As the Western Union and Atlantic Pact Defence Organisation became stronger the trend of policy towards Western Europe had become more positive. He emphasised, however, that Ministers had not yet agreed that we should reinforce the Continent in the event of war and, in fact, the Defence Committee had recently taken the line that we must avoid being forced into such a course of action by the French.<sup>109</sup>

Elliot's reminder seems to have had some effect on the Chiefs of Staff as the only positive action recommended with respect to European defence was agreement to Elliot's suggestion that the Joint

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109. COS(50)14th Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/28.

Intelligence Committee prepare an appraisal of the likely effect on the countries of Western Europe of Russian occupation.

The Chiefs of Staff returned to the issue of Britain's commitment to the defence of Western Europe on 8 March when they considered a JPS paper on "Allied Defence Policy and Strategy".<sup>110</sup> The discussion of this report highlights the major reason for the turmoil in British strategy in late 1949 and early 1950. We have seen that tensions between the priority to be given to the Middle East and Western Europe had been partially the result of the need to cope with allies. A more fundamental reason, however, underlay Britain's current strategic predicament. Soviet possession of the atomic bomb meant that the Chiefs of Staff could no longer view with equanimity the prospect of the Soviets ensconced on the opposite side of the Channel.

The lead possessed by the United States in stockpiling atomic bombs would, on account of the early possession of this weapon by the Russians lose much of its deterrent effect sooner than had been anticipated.

In the event of war, there was now no reason to suppose that the United Kingdom could survive for long the weight of attack that could be brought to bear by the Russians in possession of the Channel coast. It had become of vital importance for the survival of the United Kingdom that the enemy should be held no further West than the line of the Rhine. Even with the advent of improved weapons we could not afford to forego the earlier warning of air attack that could be obtained by Allied possession of the Low Countries.<sup>111</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff agreed that while the report itself was too long for presentation to Ministers, the JPS should prepare a resume that

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110. JP(49)172(Final), withheld, DEFE 6/10 and DEFE 4/29.

111. COS(50)37th Mtg, Min 8, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/29.



they could then forward.

While an approved reformulation of British defence policy was still several months in the future, the reasons impelling that reformulation should now be obvious. Just as airpower had shifted the focal point of Commonwealth defence from India to the Middle East after the war, now another aspect of the development of airpower, Soviet possession of the atomic bomb, was forcing the Chiefs of Staff to reassess the requirements for the defence of the United Kingdom and hence the viability of Commonwealth defence itself.

When the Chiefs of Staff considered a JPS report on "United Kingdom Contribution to the Defence of Western Europe" on 13 March the unsettled nature of the debate was still obvious. Sir John Slessor took the lead. He thought that the JPS report was not forceful enough. He had prepared a paper of his own using as a guide the paper that Slim had previously presented to the Chiefs of Staff.<sup>112</sup> Slim while agreeing on the need to present the case forcefully to ministers showed his own integrity by saying that the implication in both the Chief of the Air Staff's and JPS papers that Britain would be indefensible if the Russians overran the rest of Western Europe was not necessarily true and certainly the Chiefs of Staff would not recommend against making the attempt. Fraser said that he was not totally satisfied with the prospect of sending army reinforcements to the continent without corresponding air reinforcements. Slim pointed out that the lack of tactical air support would affect these troops no

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112. Slim's paper referred to here is COS(49)413, 26 November 1949, "United Kingdom Contribution to the Defence of Western Europe", DEFE 5/18.

matter where they were employed. Slessor then broached the idea that it would be wrong to split Britain's small bomber forces by sending part of it to the Middle East and he proposed that these forces should all be employed in Western Europe to aid in halting any Russian advance. Clearly the Chiefs of Staff still had issues to resolve in their own minds before the case could be presented to ministers.<sup>113</sup>

After a further meeting the Chiefs of Staff brought the issue before the new Minister of Defence, Emmanuel Shinwell,<sup>114</sup> at a Staff Conference on 21 March.<sup>115</sup> Shinwell concurred in the Chiefs of Staff appraisal and ask<sup>ed</sup> them to prepare an aide memoire for him.

In the Defence Committee on 23 March, the Chiefs of Staff proposal received sharp criticism. While the critical ministers are not identified by name, they raised such issues as how such a small force as two division could possibly make any difference, how the French would be encouraged by a force that would not be available until three months after the start of the war, how the French army was supposed to hold for three months against an assault that if launched would be many times more powerful than that launched by the Germans in 1940 and how the French populace would react if the small extent of the British commitment became known. These ministers were not arguing for a larger commitment, but rather were following the general line that had been British policy since the end of the war of avoiding any

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113. JP(50)22, considered at COS(50)39th Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/29.

114. Shinwell became Minister of Defence on 28 February 1950.

115. COS(50)46th Mtg, Min 1, DEFE 4/30.

firm commitment. Shinwell and Slim handled the defence of the Chiefs of Staff position. Attlee decided the issue in a positive fashion:

Summing up, The Prime Minister said that, in entering into the proposed understanding, grave risks were certainly entailed. It was quite clear, however, that it was in our interest to build up the French army and so advance the date when the security of Western Europe and therefore the United Kingdom might be placed on a surer footing. He felt, therefore, that the proposed promise should be made, and would settle with the Foreign Secretary and the Minister of Defence the broad terms in which it should be stated and the procedure to be adopted in communicating it to our Allies.<sup>116</sup>

Thus Britain adopted a formal if modest continental commitment. It was hoped that by taking the lead, Britain might induce the Americans to make a similar commitment. What was certain, however, was that British strategy as embodied in DO(47)44 had been further altered. The question first raised by the lack of American support for Britain's position in the Middle East the previous October was now even more acute. How was Britain to continue to maintain a firm hold on the Middle East in addition to this continental commitment? How could the new continental commitment be reconciled to previous conceptions of Commonwealth defence?

The issue was not a simple one. The Chiefs of Staff had rejected the report prepared by the JPS as a result of Templer's initiative in October.<sup>117</sup> Instead the Chiefs of Staff instructed the JPS "to prepare, ab initio, a World-Wide Appreciation of Allied Strategy,

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116. DO(50)5th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/8.

117. JP(49)124, "Future Defence Policy", withheld, DEFE 4/27 and DEFE 6/10. The report was rejected at COS(49)188th Mtg, Min 11, 21 December 1949, withheld, DEFE 4/27.

together with an estimate of the contribution which the United Kingdom should make towards this strategy".<sup>118</sup> This "ab initio report" was JPS(49)172 discussed on 8 March mentioned previously. It will be recalled that the Chiefs of Staff had considered the report too long and had instructed the JPS to prepare a resume for submission to ministers. When they considered the resume on 13 March, Slessor suggested that as they had already decided the issue of the United Kingdom's contribution to the defence of Western Europe there was no rush to consider the rest of allied strategy. He proposed to write a draft himself suitable for ministers that he would circulate shortly. His colleagues agreed to his proposal.<sup>119</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff reviewed and redrafted the ensuing paper on global strategy at great length in the latter half of April.<sup>120</sup> They also invited criticism from other departments in Whitehall. On 25 April they discussed the paper with Sir Henry Tizard the government's scientific adviser. At their meeting on 26 April the Chiefs of Staff had invited representatives from the Foreign, Commonwealth Relations and Colonial Offices to express their opinions on the paper. Both the Foreign Office and the Commonwealth Relation Office were represented by their Permanent Under-Secretaries. Sir William Strang from the Foreign Office "considered the Review an admirable document". While

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118. JP(50)9(Final), 13 January 1950, DEFE 6/12. This report summarizes the events described above.

119. COS(50)39th Mtg, Min 2, Confidential Annex, DEFE 4/29.

120. On 21, 24, 25, 26 and 28 April at COS(50)62nd Mtg, Min 4; 63rd Mtg, Min 1; 65th Mtg, Min 3; 66th Mtg, Min 1; 68th Mtg, Min 2 respectively all in DEFE 4/30.

he had no political objections he noted the shift in emphasis away from the Middle East and towards Europe. He commented that the issue of rearming Germany was very sensitive. He was not altogether happy with the Chiefs of Staff policy of taking the offensive against communism. Also while supporting the Chiefs' of Staff desire to co-ordinate all aspects of strategy with their American counterparts, he felt "there were a number of purely political aspects of the 'Cold War', which would not be appropriate to discuss through the military channel". Strang's comments are of interest because they give some insight into the broad scope of the policy the Chiefs of Staff were attempting to put forward. Sir Percivale Leisching suggested that the Commonwealth Relations Office be allowed to submit certain amendments to make the report more acceptable to Commonwealth governments. To this the Chiefs of Staff readily agreed. Mr. Luke, the Colonial Office representative, confined himself to pointing out "that the Colonial Office had already adopted a policy of taking a tougher line with Communism", and to ensuring that the policy embodied in the report would be made known to appropriate colonial governors after the report had been approved. The comments of all three of these senior civil servants reflect the status that the postwar Chiefs of Staff had achieved in Whitehall in formulating British policy as well as purely military strategy. On 28 April the Chiefs of Staff at last approved the paper as COS(50)139<sup>121</sup> for submission to the Minister of Defence

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121. DEFE 5/20 which contains this paper if it is not withheld from public inspection was recalled by the Ministry of Defence on 3 February 1986. DO(50)45 the version of this paper approved by the Defence Committee is withheld in CAB 130/9. All comments on the various versions of this paper are the result of unvetted discussion of it.

and the Defence Committee.

The report was divided into two sections: "Allied Defence Policy and Global Strategy" and "The British Commonwealth Contribution".<sup>122</sup> These section titles illuminate the changes in British strategic thinking since DO(47)44 in 1947. It will be recalled that the section titles of DO(47)44 were "Commonwealth Defence Policy" and "The Strategy of Commonwealth Defence". The substitution of Allied for Commonwealth in the first section reflects Britain's altered strategic position. The threat in early 1947 had been assumed to be remote, ten years in the future. British strategists had been contemptuous of the possibility of meaningful aid from continental allies. At the time strategic co-operation with the United States had been a desire rather than a reality. DO(47)44 represented a peripheral or maritime strategy in the classical mold of Elizabethan or late Victorian strategies. Just as Elizabeth's seadogs concentrated on intercepting Spanish treasure fleets and Victorian strategist concentrated on control of "narrow seas" and strategic bases, so the Chiefs of Staff looked on air bases in the Middle East as the linchpin of British strategy. In the ensuing years the threat appeared more imminent. Britain's economic weakness became more apparent. DO(47)44 had been written before the first postwar sterling crisis in August 1947. Since that time there had been a second sterling crisis with devaluation in September 1949. As a result of the increased threat and decreased means, strategic thinking became more clearly focused. The problem was immediate and no longer distant. Even the full support of the

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122. COS(50)74th Mtg, Min 2, DEFE 4/31.

United States and the Commonwealth was no longer enough; continental allies were needed. In the evolution of postwar strategy, British planners had come to view themselves as being at the centre of a great allied coalition opposing the Soviet Union. Hence the net had been cast wider and "Commonwealth Defence Policy" had become "Allied Defence Policy and Global Strategy". Under the larger umbrella of allied defence, British planners still viewed the Commonwealth as the extended expression of the British contribution to this allied coalition, hence part II, "The British Commonwealth Contribution".

The Chiefs of Staff discussed COS(50)139 with the Minister of Defence on 11 May. Field Marshal Slim summarized the paper for Shinwell:

. . . there was no fundamental alteration in the defence policy and strategy proposed in the present report but there was a most important change in the emphasis to be placed on the relative importance of Western Europe and the Middle East. In the past we had been prepared to contemplate the overrunning of Western Europe on the grounds that it would be possible for Britain and the United States to fight back from bases in the United Kingdom and elsewhere. The Chiefs of Staff now considered that the defence of Western Europe must form part of the defence of the United Kingdom. The reason for this change in policy was that it was now considered that, if Europe was overwhelmed, the United Kingdom would be threatened as never before and might well not survive. . . . Loss of Western Europe and loss of the Middle East might both mean disaster; but loss of Western Europe placed us in more immediate peril. The consequence of the policy now proposed would be that the forces available to defend the Middle East at the outbreak of war would be extremely slender. A point in our favour however, was that the threat to the Middle East would develop more slowly than in the West. Moreover, it was hoped to get the Commonwealth countries to make a substantial contribution to the defence of the Middle East.

In response to the report, Shinwell said that he would "endorse the aim of our overall policy as defined by the Chiefs of Staff". He had

reservations about the Chiefs of Staff advocacy of a forward policy with respect to the cold war. He would accept the Chiefs of Staff views on the dangers of atomic disarmament. He fully concurred with their stress on the importance of the air defence of Great Britain and the need to defend Western Europe. With respect to German industry and rearmament he had reservations. He "entirely agreed with the assessment in paragraph 33 of the critical importance of the Egyptian base". Finally, he was concerned that the Chiefs of Staff not underrate the threat to Malaya after the experiences in the last war. He was prepared to recommend that the Defence Committee endorse the report taking into account the reservations he had expressed.<sup>123</sup>

The report was approved by the Defence Committee on 25 May.<sup>124</sup> While the minutes of this meeting have been withheld from public inspection, its conclusions can be deduced by the minutes of the Chiefs of Staff meeting on 21 June.

THE COMMITTEE were informed that, in accordance with the recommendations of the Chiefs of Staff to the Defence Committee, copies of the review of Defence Policy and Global Strategy were being circulated to various authorities overseas. The Chief of the Imperial General Staff was handing copies of the report to the Australian and New Zealand Chiefs of Staff, and the Commonwealth Relations Office had sent copies of the paper to the U.K. High Commissioners in Australia and New Zealand for onward transmission to the Australian and New Zealand Governments. Action on the procedure for handing the paper over to the South Africans was in hand as a result of the recent meeting which the Chiefs of Staff had held with Sir Evelyn Baring. Copies of the paper were being forwarded by the Commonwealth Relations Office to the U.K. High Commissioners in India, Pakistan and Ceylon for their personal information. The Report was also being sent to the Commanders-in-Chief, Middle East and Far East.

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123. Ibid.

124. DO(50)10th Mtg, Min 1, withheld, CAB 131/8.



The report would be sent to Canada at the same time as copies were forwarded to Washington.<sup>125</sup>

The distribution given to DO(50)45 is a small but valuable piece of evidence of the success British strategists had had in their attempts to create a viable Commonwealth defence in the postwar world. Slim on his trip to Australia and New Zealand seeking greater co-operation in the Middle East would discuss the paper with both countries' Chiefs of Staff and their governments. In South Africa, Sir Evelyn Baring would be given the paper as he continued cautiously to seek the co-operation of the Nationalist government. The paper would be sent to Canada in conjunction with its distribution to the United States reflecting Canada's pivotal position between Britain and the United States. The Chiefs of Staff devoted special attention to the way that the paper should be presented to the United States. Lord Tedder was allowed his own discretion as to timing. The British Chiefs of Staff were unofficially aware that the Americans had also just completed a global strategy review.<sup>126</sup> Rather than attempt to get the Americans to agree to produce one combined strategic concept, "Our aim should be to get the U.S. Chiefs of Staff to authorise their Planners to prepare, with the British Joint Planning Staff, a revised emergency plan applicable to the period up to 1954; such a plan would, of course, have to be based on the United States and United Kingdom concepts of global strategy".<sup>127</sup> In the new dominions in South Asia

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125. COS(50)93rd Mtg, Min 8, DEFE 4/32.

126. Ibid. The paper referred to is undoubtedly N.S.C. 68.

127. Ibid.

the strategy agreed by the Chiefs of Staff in August 1949 reduced the need for intimate defence co-operation, but British representatives would still be made aware of this latest review of global strategy. Colonial governors would be informed by and at the discretion of the Commanders-in-Chief Middle East and Far East. The carefully arranged distribution of this paper stands in sharp contrast to DO(47)44. The evidence suggests that the distribution of that paper was limited to only a handful of ministers and the Chiefs of Staff. The web of Commonwealth defence had continually expanded since the end of the war and was still being spun at the outbreak of the Korean War.

#### The Middle East: The Weakening Commitment

Only in the Middle East did the web of Commonwealth defence show signs of beginning to unravel. Yet if the web unravelled in the Middle East could it still hang together. This was the central paradox confronting British strategists at the start of the 1950s. The tension that surrounded the decision to change Britain's strategic commitment to the Middle East is apparent from the agonizing way in which the Chiefs of Staff altered that commitment in the final year before the Korean War.

In July 1949 the JPS had prepared a report for a meeting of British diplomatic representatives from the Middle East. The Vice Chiefs of Staff approved this report on 15 July 1949 and it was used by Tedder as an aide memoire when he addressed the conference of diplomatic representatives on 26 July. The nine page report with an

eight page annex gives a comprehensive view of the Chiefs of Staff thinking on the strategic importance of the Middle East at that time. According to the report, "The Middle East is important because:- (a) it is an offensive air base; (b) it is a source of oil; (c) it is a centre of communications; (d) it gives depth to the defence of Africa". Within the Middle East Egypt was the vital strategic area, "since it alone possesses the essential air bases, ports, internal communications, water supplies, industrial potential and manpower necessary for the maintenance of a main base of the size required for the defence of the Middle East". The report said that the prospects for co-operation with the United States, Australia, New Zealand and South Africa in the defence of the Middle East were good. The ultimate aim of British policy in the Middle East should be a comprehensive security arrangement between all of the countries in the region backed by the United Kingdom and the United States. The need for co-operation with the United States was particularly stressed.

The increasing interest of the United States in the Middle East, with particular reference to the security of the Middle East oil supplies, is a political factor of major importance. Every effort should be made to foster this interest and to secure increasing participation of the United States in the defence and economic development of the Middle East on the basis of a common policy.

Until a Middle East pact is possible, however, the United Kingdom must continue to obtain her essential military requirements by bilateral agreements with individual countries concerned, or by joint agreements which include the United States.<sup>128</sup>

The emphasis on the need for American support was prophetic. Indeed,

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128. JP(49)59(Final), 11 July 1949, DEFE 6/9. After approval at COS(49)102nd Mtg, Min 4, 15 July 1949, DEFE 4/23, the report was circulated as COS(49)239, DEFE 5/15.

American support or lack thereof was potentially the most serious obstacle to the maintenance of Britain's position in the Middle East. Arab nationalism might increase British costs but could not in the short run by itself defeat Britain. Lack of American support, however, could unravel not only Britain's position in the Middle East, but also the entire fabric of Commonwealth defence.

Against this background, the reason for the strong British reaction against the American strategic concept presented by American Chiefs of Staff at their meeting with the British Chiefs of Staff on 3 August becomes understandable. In preparing for the A.B.C. planning discussion,

THE DIRECTORS OF PLANS said that at previous meetings with the Americans they had always maintained that the Middle East must be held at all cost. They enquired whether this still applied and whether they should take the line, at their forthcoming meeting with the United States Planners, that we were determined to hold the Middle East even if we had to rely almost entirely on the forces of the British Commonwealth.<sup>129</sup>

The Chiefs of Staff responded, "that our attitude must be that we would continue to hold the Middle East at all costs" while stressing the need for U.S. air and naval support in the region. So great was the Chiefs' of Staff concern over the American attitude that they commissioned the JIC to report on both the impact of a British withdrawal from the Middle East and the impact of the region being overrun by the Soviets in the early stages of a war. This report was discussed under the heading "Implications of Certain Aspects of United

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129. COS(49)131st Mtg, Min 8, Confidential Annex, 8 September 1949, DEFE 4/24.

States Strategy for War in 1951".<sup>130</sup>

The results of the discussions between the planners and between Lord Tedder and the American Chiefs of Staff can hardly have heartened British strategists. Bevin was also concerned, particularly by several positions the U.S. had taken in the United Nations. At an informal meeting with Alexander, Tedder, Templer and the Assistant Chief of the Naval Staff on 11 November 1949, Bevin complained that recent U.S. positions with respect to Cyrenaica and Egypt might make the British position in the Middle East untenable. To this concern the Chiefs of Staff response was unequivocal, "abandonment of the Middle East would split the Commonwealth in two and be a disaster".<sup>131</sup> Bucked up by the Chiefs of Staff, Bevin continued his seemingly endless attempt to put Britain's position in the Middle East on a sound footing.

The importance of the Middle East for Commonwealth defence was clearly spelled out by Tedder before the Defence Committee on 15 November. Referring to plans for defence of the Middle East, he said:

New Zealand had resorted to conscription and was in a position to promise a Division; South Africa were thinking of sending some air forces and an armoured Division; and there was a good chance that Australia too would follow with a contribution; all for this area. At some future date Pakistan might revert to their idea of making a contribution too. A United Kingdom withdrawal from the Middle East would cause all these plans to fall apart.<sup>132</sup>

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130. JIC(49)69 discussed at COS(49)135th Mtg, Min 6, 14 September 1949, Ibid.

131. Record of informal meeting, CAB 21/2087.

132. DO(49)20th Mtg, Min 1, CAB 131/8.

Thus the Middle East was not only strategically vital, but also provided the one area in which the United Kingdom could use its leadership to try to cement the majority of the Commonwealth for united action.

Thus in mid-November 1949 the Chiefs of Staff were still holding firm on a commitment to the Middle East. However, we have already seen at the same time they were again considering the level of Britain's commitment to Western Europe. What ensued from this debate was not so much a diminution in the Chiefs of Staff appraisal of the importance to the Middle East as a rise in their estimation of the importance of the defence of Western Europe. Confronted with the necessity of giving a higher priority to the defence of Western Europe and employing far greater forces in the Far East in Malaya and in Hong Kong than had been anticipated at the time of DO(47)44, the Chiefs of Staff acquiesced to a weakening of Britain's commitment to the Middle East. This shift was evolutionary, it result<sup>ed</sup><sub>A</sub> from multiple causes and was only clearly en<sup>n</sup>uciated in the Chiefs of Staff committee in the 5 May Staff Conference with Shinwell. Even when DO(50)45 had been approved with its greater emphasis on the defence of Western Europe, the Chiefs of Staff were still committed to the importance of the Middle East. The question was not one of desire, but rather of possibility. A firm hold on the Middle East was still part of British strategy, but that hold could only be maintained with the aid of others.

We have already seen the importance attached by the Chiefs of Staff to obtaining the co-operation of Australia, New Zealand and South Africa in Middle East defence. American co-operation in the Middle East also improved after the October strategy discussions in

Washington. Much of the record has been vetted so it is only possible to construct a sketchy picture. Slim made a trip to Washington at the end of November 1949. The results of this trip are withheld as mentioned earlier,<sup>133</sup> but considering the problems that had arisen from Tedder's meeting with the American Chiefs of Staff in October the issues seem likely to have been how to cope with the end of the Combined Chiefs of Staff, the problem of Britain and America's commitment to the defence of Western Europe and American hostility to Britain's strategy in the Middle East. With respect to this last issue, Slim had just returned from a trip to the Far East in early November and had met with King Farouk in Egypt.<sup>134</sup> He therefore had the problems of Britain's position in the Middle East fresh in his mind. Michael Wright of the Foreign Office also made a trip to Washington apparently in early December to discuss the Middle East. On his return, he met with the Chiefs of Staff on 16 and 21 December to discuss the results of his visits. In both cases the minutes of these discussions have been withheld.<sup>135</sup>

Whether because of these meetings or for other reasons, in January 1950 the Chiefs of Staff had begun a reappraisal of their plans for the defence of the Middle East in 1957.<sup>136</sup> As part of this

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133. COS(49)182nd Mtg, Min 3, 8 December 1949, withheld, DEFE 4/27.

134. Record of Slim's meeting with King Farouk, 4 November 1949, WO 216/703.

135. COS(49)186th Mtg, Min 4, Confidential Annex and 188th Mtg, Min 8, Confidential Annex, both withheld, DEFE 4/27.

136. JP(50)5, withheld, DEFE 6/12. See the terms of reference dated 6 January 1950, the revised terms of reference dated 26 January 1950 and the supplementary terms of reference dated 12 May 1950 for this report in CAB 21/2087.

reappraisal, the Chiefs of Staff put greater emphasis on the ability of the Turks to contest a Russian advance into the Middle East.<sup>137</sup> American military authorities had long had greater confidence in the military potential of the Turks than had their British counterparts. When General Collins, the Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, toured the Middle East in late March and early April 1950 the differences between the American and British appraisals of the military capabilities of the Turks was one of the issues that the British Chiefs of Staff wanted to have addressed.<sup>138</sup>

General Collins's visit to the Middle East also reflects that a degree of harmony had returned to Anglo/American military relations in the Middle East. General Collins went to great lengths to reinforce the British position in Egypt. As reported by the British Ambassador to Egypt to Michael Wright:

It is gratifying that General Collins should have been so ready to take up the cudgels so willingly and in a spirit of helpfulness. This is illustrated by his remark to me, with regard to the arms supplies, that he had strongly advised the Egyptian authorities not to go in for different [t]ypes of arms, and that since they were largely equipped with British arms, to continue to seek British equipment.<sup>139</sup>

General Sir Neil Ritchie on the B.J.S.M. wrote Slim in the same vein after he had had a discussion with General Collins:

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137. COS(50)14th Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, 24 January 1950, DEFE 4/28.

138. COS(50)45th Mtg, Min 1, Confidential Annex, 20 March 1950, DEFE 4/29.

139. Telegram from Ronald Campbell to Michael Wright, 8 April 1950, WO 216/707.



General Collins spoke perfectly openly on this matter, and his aim throughout was to help us in any way he could with the Egyptians. In his view it was quite essential that we should have the facilities for maintaining forces in the Middle East in emergency. He realises it is a long term matter and it is not possible to set up the base needed for our maintenance there as a last minute afterthought when war appears imminent.<sup>140</sup>

American assistance in Egypt was of great importance. The Chiefs of Staff still considered the Egyptian base to be a vital part of Commonwealth defence. From 4 June through 15 December 1949 highly secret talks on military co-operation had been conducted between the Egyptians and the British.<sup>141</sup> The Egyptians wanted British equipment and training and British support in the event of general war, but were still unwilling to agree to a peacetime British presence in Egypt. A caretaker government was installed in Cairo in early August pending new elections and further negotiations were deferred. Subsequently, Egyptian politicians blocked further progress. Visits by Slim in November 1949 and Bevin on his return from Colombo in January 1950 both failed to make progress in the light of the intransigence of Egyptian politicians who continued to demand the total British evacuation of Egypt. General Collins found much the same attitude in his discussions in April 1950. He said that his discussions with King Farouk and the Commander-in-Chief of the Egyptian Armed Forces had been promising, but those with the Ministers of Defence and Foreign Affairs were, "A complete wash out, or as we say in America, no soap".<sup>142</sup>

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140. Letter From Gen Sir N Ritchie to FM Slim, 18 April 1950, Ibid.

141. COS(50)5, DEFE 5/19.

142. Telegram from Ronald Campbell to Michael Wright, 8 April 1950, WO 216/707.

Against this background of seemingly endless futility, Slim again tried to break the ice on his trip to Australia and New Zealand. His brief, approved by the Defence Committee, stressed the need for joint arrangements and a sharing of defence tasks between Britain and Egypt.<sup>143</sup> Although the proposals that Slim extracted from the Egyptians were less than British planners had hoped for, they again offered possibility of movement on the issue of a new treaty. The Egyptian proposals included the complete evacuation of the British Army from Egypt, integration of the RAF in some way with the Egyptian Air Force, arrangements for a base in accordance with British wishes under the direction of British advisers and ready for British use in the event of war, the right of re-entry in the event war became imminent and Egyptian troops in greater strength than British troops to garrison the Canal in peace.<sup>144</sup> The British reply to these proposals was to be sent to Slim in mid-July for his return trip from Australia and New Zealand. Once again the phantom of a new Anglo/Egyptian military accord presented itself, though there seemed to be little enthusiasm on the British side for the latest Egyptian proposals.<sup>145</sup>

Compared with the British stakes in Egypt, the rest of the Middle East did not cause the Chiefs of Staff grave concern in the last year

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143. DO(50)40, CAB 131/9 considered at DO(50)10th Mtg, Min 3, 25 May 1950, CAB 131/8.

144. JP(50)77(Revised Final), DEFE 6/13.

145. COS(50)87th Mtg, Min 3, 13 June 1950, and COS(50)97th Mtg, Min 6, 28 June 1950, DEFE 4/32.

before the Korean War. Relations between the Arabs and Israel had settled into a hostile truce. British forces continued to maintain their watch at Aqaba and the Chiefs of Staff continued their paternal interest in maintaining the Arab Legion. In Cyrenaica the Chiefs of Staff had come to the conclusion that for the immediate future the cost of building facilities for any sizeable force would be prohibitive. Financial considerations had entered into the decision made in January 1950 to maintain some of the strategic reserve for the Middle East in the United Kingdom. The Chiefs of Staff supported Bevin's proposals in the Defence Committee on British actions to give effect to the U.N. decision to grant independence to a unified independent Libya by 1 January 1952.<sup>146</sup> Their main concern over having to evacuate Tripolitania was the potential for local unrest rather than the loss of barracks. Military co-operation with Iraq was quietly maintained. Rumours of an Iraqi-Syrian Union in the last months of 1949 had first been looked upon by British strategists with considerable favour, though at second thought the reality of additional commitments had made them more cautious.

Britain's difficulties in preserving a Commonwealth defence centred on the Middle East in the middle of 1950 were not the result of local or regional forces in the area. Arab nationalism caused difficulties, but in general Britain had the facilities that it required. The question of insuring that those facilities would be available on a long term basis was still a problem, but present

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146. DO(49)25th Mtg, Min 1, 20 December 1949, CAB 131/8. The Chiefs of Staff had previously discussed these proposals at COS(49)187th Mtg, Min 1, 19 December 1949, DEFE 4/27.

arrangements still afforded ample time to seek solutions. Nor was the climate for finding solutions considered totally unfavourable.

Britain's real strategic problems in the Middle East on the eve of the Korean War were all external to the region. In order of importance these problems were the level of the threat to the United Kingdom itself, co-operation with the Americans, manpower shortages and economic weakness. All of these problems manifested themselves in the Middle East as it had become the weakest link in Commonwealth defence, but they were problems that undermined the entire fabric of Britain's position as a world power.

The threat to the United Kingdom as we have seen had been greatly altered by the Soviet acquisition of the atomic bomb. At the end of the Second World War Soviet power had been restricted to the marching radius of the Red Army. In this situation the Soviet threat to Britain's global interests was greatest in the Middle East. Because of Soviet weakness on the sea and in the air, the Chiefs of Staff could view the English channel as a viable line of defence. The defence of Western Europe as portrayed in DO(47)44 was a luxury and not a necessity. The threat of nuclear bombardment had altered that picture. Now as Slim had told Shinwell, the defence of Western Europe was of paramount importance to Britain's survival. The result was a reordering of priorities in which the Middle East was the primary loser.

Following the Soviet threat in importance was the problem of strategic co-operation with the United States. The need for this co-operation had been acknowledged in Commonwealth defence planning

since the end of the war. Coaxing America to assume global commitments was an essential ingredient for a viable Commonwealth defence. Until 1947 it had not been a reality. Once it became a reality differences in American and British strategic concepts became of paramount importance. Both in the Middle East and then in Western Europe, British planners had to struggle to maintain American co-operation. With the arrival of the Soviet atomic threat, American reluctance to assume a major share of the defence of Western Europe became even more detrimental to Britain's position in the Middle East than American reluctance to assume a commitment in the latter region. Without a major American commitment to the defence of Western Europe, Britain had to look to her own defence with the impact that we have already seen on her troop strengths in the Middle East. The other danger to Britain's position in the Middle East caused by the rise of American globalism was the need to avoid at all cost overt American hostility to Britain's position in the region. In some respects, American hostility was a greater potential threat than the Red Army.

The manpower shortage was more a potential than an actual weakness for Britain's in the Middle East in June 1950. Politically and economically, there were actually benefits from Britain's reduced troop strengths in the Middle East. The real problem was Britain's ability to cope with a crisis in the area, and because of apparent lack of strength to do so, one of credibility. It was to fill this void that the commitment of troops from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa was so determinedly sought. The problem was more than just raw numbers. The most critical shortage was in skilled manpower. This need for skilled manpower was at the bottom of the

Chiefs of Staff continued opposition to the greater use of colonial manpower. Modern warfare as well as modern industry required skilled technicians. The need for skilled manpower led the Chiefs of Staff to oppose National Service in the dark days of 1948 as cold war tensions mounted. Both the RAF and the Royal Navy had little use for National Servicemen. The job skills required in both of these services took more time to acquire than short term service commitments provided for. Even for the army National Service would require more manpower to administrate and operate than it would generate if the period of service was only one year. Finite manpower resources coupled with a shift in strategic priorities left Britain's position in the Middle East dangerously exposed.

Going hand in hand with the manpower shortage was economic weakness. Indeed, the two were flip sides of the same coin in Britain's postwar full-employment economy. The armed forces had to compete with industry for Britain's trained manpower pool. An over balance in favour of the military would jeopardize Britain's prospects for economic recovery. As the Labour ministers were fond of pointing out, without economic recovery there would shortly be no armed forces at all. Economic stringency also meant that when training costs became significant, the armed forces could not afford to act as a national or colonial youth training scheme. Limited financial resources forced the armed services to seek the greatest yield for the amount spent. Hence, both the RAF and the Royal Navy inclined towards spending on force modernization rather than maintenance of current forces. Britain's real economic weakness, however, was not directly manifested in reduced defence spending. Defence spending as a

percentage of gross national product remained exceptionally high throughout this period. The table below gives a comparison with that of the United States:<sup>147</sup>

Fiscal Year (beginning 1 April)	Percent of Gross National Income	
	U.K.	U.S.
1945	45.8	35.6
1946	18.8	10.6
1947	9.5	6.5
1948	7.6	5.2
1949	7.1	5.7
1950 (est)	7.7	6.9

In absolute terms the defence estimates were lowest in 1948 at £692.6 million.<sup>148</sup> Britain's real economic weakness, both in general and with respect to the the Middle East in particular, manifested itself in insufficient production. Just as inability to produce greater quantities of exports hurt balance of payments, inability to produce arms and equipment weakened Britain's potential as an ally. Lack of production of such vital materials as steel was also a brake on colonial development.<sup>149</sup> Yet economic weakness, though a liability, had so far been managed. By the end of 1950 Britain's economic recovery seemed well in hand. The central assumption on the part of Labour ministers and their military advisers alike was that economic weakness represented only a temporary obstacle that postwar recovery would eventually mitigate.

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147. R.N. Rosecrance, "British Defence Strategy: 1945-1952" in R.N. Rosecrance, ed. The Dispersion of Nuclear Weapons. (New York, 1964), p. 69.

148. Cmd. 7327.

149. D.J. Morgan, The Official History of Colonial Development, Vol II, Developing British Colonial Resources 1945-1951, (London, 1980), pp. 28-30.

Thus in mid 1950, Britain maintained a precarious ascendancy in the Middle East. The region had become the weakest link in Britain's postwar world system. Until early in 1950, it had been the strategic centre of that world system. Now the blueprints for Commonwealth defence had been altered and it remained to be seen whether the new modifications would prove compatible with the original design.

The last year before the outbreak of the Korean War had been a time of trial for British strategists. The explosion of a Soviet nuclear weapon earlier than expected had forced them to make difficult choices sooner than they had anticipated. American strategic planners had taken a more independent line, making it harder for British policy makers to maintain co-operation and at the same time their own objectives. Progress in co-operation with the old dominions had also become difficult. Only Canada presented no problem. Changes in government in both New Zealand and Australia at the end of 1949 had slowed down the process of defence collaboration, particularly in getting the commitment of these countries to the defence of the Middle East. The Nationalist government in South Africa remained guarded against appearing to co-operate too closely. The colonial empire despite a more co-operative spirit lacked the resources to make any great contribution in the near term. Britain's strategy towards the dominions in South Asia had found a temporary modus vivendi, but long term co-operation with India and Pakistan could only come after a peaceful solution to the Kashmir crisis. That solution was not in sight in June 1950. In the Middle East Britain maintained a precarious ascendancy.



Commonwealth defence had come a long way since August 1945, but it still fell well short of the firm structure that British strategists hoped for. It was a rickety edifice in the stormy postwar world. Yet its construction had also confounded all who had predicted the early demise of Britain as a global power. This rickety edifice had not been constructed "in a fit of absence of mind". It was the product of a careful analysis of Britain's strategic position. It attempted to maximize strengths and minimize weaknesses. Whether it would stand or fall in the 1950s would depend on the future course of events and the way in which British policy makers handled them.

## Chapter 8: Conclusion

On 15 August 1945, VJ Day, the Second World War came to an abrupt end. A new Labour Prime Minister elected primarily for his party's position on domestic issues had been in office only three weeks. Britain's economic strength had been sapped by six years of war. Military defeats, particularly in the Far East, in the first half of the war had been extremely damaging to British prestige. Despite full mobilization British forces in the field at the end of the war were significantly smaller than those of either the Soviet Union or the United States. The situation did not bode well for the maintenance of Britain as a world power.

Because of Britain's subsequent demise as a global power, Britain's weaknesses at the end of the Second World War have generally been the central focus of attention. A whole historiography has grown up that takes the decline of British power as an implicit assumption. This assumption in its turn leads to a mind set that sees all attempts to preserve Britain's world position as at least irrelevant and probably as a reactionary struggle against an assumed predestined order. This approach prevents the observer from seeing events in the context that they appeared to participants at the time and in so doing limits one's ability to understand them.

Both Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff were well aware of British weaknesses at the end of the war. Because of the loss of most of

Britain's capital assets in the course of the war, the only way forward to avoid economic ruin was expanded trade. With the decrease in Britain's invisible assets, exports had to pay for essential imports. Britain needed world trade for economic recovery. For world trade some type of viable world order had to be established. The Soviet Union having built "socialism in one country" had no vested interest in world trade and saw positive advantage in destabilizing the world order as a means of hastening the demise of capitalism. Though American policy makers viewed increased world trade as highly desirable, it remained to be seen how much energy America would be willing to invest in maintaining a world order conducive to expanded trade. The British attempt to construct a viable Commonwealth defence after the war resulted from the world situation that confronted British policy makers.

As it evolved Commonwealth defence came to embrace five separate elements: an American connection, a connection with the "old" Dominions, an attempt to develop and integrate the dependent empire, a shift in the strategic centre of gravity to the Middle East, and a resultant attempt to find a place for the new dominions in South Asia. All five of the elements were fluid. Developments in one area often affected the others. Although agreed strategies were approved in June 1947 and again in May 1950, Commonwealth defence was continually adapted to changing perceptions and circumstances. It was a strategy arrived at by consensus, but consensus was occasionally interrupted by periods of heated and sometimes protracted debate. The charge that postwar strategy was a holdover from an imperialist past and that there was never a strategic reappraisal is certainly wide of the

mark.

In the first nine months after the war the central issues in the evolution of Commonwealth defence were Britain's position in the Middle East and the attempt to incorporate the old dominions into a peacetime system of global security. The debate on the Middle East remained unresolved, but the situation with respect to the old dominions appeared to progress favourably. The Prime Ministers's Meeting of 1946 had reached agreement on the establishment of a defence liaison system between the members of the Commonwealth modeled on the wartime Combined Chiefs of Staff system with the Americans.

In the period from May 1946 to September 1947, the development of Commonwealth defence made only slow and halting progress. The defence liaison system with the old dominions was extremely slow in being established and accomplished very little once it was. In the Middle East, the Chiefs of Staff and Bevin succeeded in overcoming Attlee's objections to a British commitment to the region. From the military point of view this commitment was based on the need for air bases in the region as a means of countering the preponderant strength of the Red Army. India and Pakistan had been granted independence within the Commonwealth largely as a result of the combined efforts of Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff in Britain and of Mountbatten as the man on the spot. The final rush to independence had, however, caused the Chiefs of Staff considerable anxiety and the ultimate strategic verdict over Indian independence remained to be given. The colonial empire remained a strategic burden and co-operation between the Chiefs of Staff and Colonial Office was marginal. However, it was during this period that first Britain's postwar defence policy was approved.

Commonwealth defence had become the official British strategy.

From September 1947 to October 1948, developing strategic defence planning with the United States became the central issue in Commonwealth defence. Strategic co-operation with the United States grew from talks on the Middle East held in the Pentagon in October 1947. Strategic co-operation with the United States was not a panacea for Commonwealth defence, though. By the end of the first round of planning talks with the Americans, the British found themselves assuming additional commitments for the defence of Western Europe. In the Middle East, British strategists continued trying to find a means of securing Britain's strategic interests in the area with a lack of success. With respect to both the colonial empire and the new dominions in South Asia, the story was much the same. Little progress was evident in either of these areas in further developing Commonwealth defence.

Against this background, the period from October 1948 till June 1949 stands in sharp contrast. During this nine month period the previous designs of British policy makers began to come to fruition; it appeared that Commonwealth defence had at last taken off. The heating up of the cold war in 1948 proved to be a fortuitous backdrop for the Commonwealth Prime Ministers' Meeting of October 1948. Tentative approval was given by dominion Prime Ministers for defence planning within the Commonwealth on a regional basis. In the ensuing months, British planners held talks with their counterparts in Canada and South Africa and made arrangements for those with Australia and New Zealand. British strategists sought an American and Canadian commitment to the defence of Western Europe with the creation of NATO.

They sought to gain a commitment from Australia, New Zealand and South Africa to the defence of the Middle East. Through their special relationship with the United States, their membership in the Western European Union and the Commonwealth, British strategists were able to act as the brokers of free world strategic planning. This period also marked a breakthrough in co-operation between the Chiefs of Staff and the Colonial Office. The crisis in Malaya and the threat posed to Hong Kong by the success of the Chinese communists gave the Colonial Office a sense of urgency in addressing the strategic needs of the colonies. The Colonial Office readily accepted the Chiefs' of Staff appraisal of the level of colonial forces required, but the issue of financing these forces remained unresolved. The success of the Chinese communist also served to alter the strategic appraisal of the role of the new dominions in South Asia within Commonwealth defence. The need for democratic India to serve as an alternative to a communist China became paramount. Only in the Middle East did Commonwealth defence fail to achieve any significant progress during this period. The turmoil that followed the creation of Israel and their inability to secure a firm American commitment left British strategists still with their finger in the dike, but with no solution to their strategic needs in sight.

The last year before the Korean War witnessed tremendous turbulence in the evolution of postwar Commonwealth defence. The ground on which Commonwealth defence rested was shifting even as the edifice was being erected. Changed circumstances altered the terms of reference of some of the old problems that had confronted Commonwealth defence and raised entirely new problems. The need for defence

co-operation with the old dominions remained, but firm commitments seemed tediously slow in coming. In the Far East, the success of communism in China, and its threat to Burma, Indo-China and Malaya, made the Commonwealth connection with the new dominions in South Asia all important. The policy of Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff of placing primary emphasis on maintaining India and Pakistan within the Commonwealth had been vindicated, but in a way that could not originally have been anticipated. The communist threat also became the dominant security issue in the colonial empire, and in January 1950 the Defence Committee had at least partially solved the issue of financing colonial forces. The increased commitments for Commonwealth defence created by the cold war added emphasis to the need for the closest possible co-operation with the United States, but American strategic concepts in Western Europe and the Middle East raised rather than lower<sup>ed</sup> the problems confronting the British architects of Commonwealth defence. The advent of a Soviet nuclear capability several years earlier than expected also complicated the picture confronting British strategists. The end result was a new global defence policy that placed greater emphasis on non-Commonwealth allies and reduced the British commitment to the defence of the Middle East. Defence of the Middle East was still seen as vital, but Britain's ability to meet that commitment alone was becoming increasingly problematical.

The Korean War further altered the global picture confronting British strategists. It marked a new level in American commitment to the maintenance of global security. It also increased British commitments in an area that had earlier been considered marginal to

Commonwealth defence. Yet the foundation of Commonwealth defence had been firmly laid in the years between VJ Day and the Korean War. And while the last year before the Korean War had raised many questions about its future, Commonwealth defence had not yet reached its zenith as a support for British global security interests.

Evidence of continued progress in the development of Commonwealth defence is not hard to find. According to Patrick Gordon Walker who served as Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations in Attlee's second Labour government, "The years 1950-1951 marked a high point in the co-ordination of strategy and foreign policy in the Commonwealth".<sup>1</sup> It has already been noted that an Australian commitment to the defence of the Middle East had apparently been made by the time of the 1951 Prime Ministers' Meeting. In late September 1950, South Africa also made a commitment to the defence of the Middle East. The Minister of Defence reported in a memorandum to the Defence Committee that at a meeting between himself, the Secretary of State for Commonwealth Relations, the Chiefs of Staff and Mr. Erasmus, the South African Minister of Defence, the latter had stated, "The Union Government were now prepared to range themselves with other anti-Communist powers in the defence of Africa to the extent of offering a substantial land and air force contribution to the battle in the Middle East".<sup>2</sup> He went on to say that the forces envisaged included an armoured division, a fighter group of nine squadrons and the personnel for one air transport squadron. With the previous

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1. Patrick Gordon Walker, The Commonwealth, (London, 1962), p. 315.

2. DO(50)82, 12 October 1950, CAB 131/9.



commitment of New Zealand to the defence of the Middle East, it appears that by the end of 1950, British policy makers had achieved their desires in this central aspect of Commonwealth defence.

Co-operation with the United States also moved forward. Talks between the British and American Chiefs of Staff in Washington in October 1950 were wide ranging. Among the topics of discussion was DO(50)45, the global strategic review by the British Chiefs of Staff. As for the future, "It was concluded that periodic meeting of the U.S.-U.K. Chiefs of Staff were desirable and would be continued; further that consideration would be given toward holding a Planners meeting, perhaps in January, and other meetings as occasions arise later on".<sup>3</sup> Such a conclusion would have warmed the hearts of the British Chiefs of Staff who in September 1945 had plaintively hoped for the continuation of wartime co-operation with their American counterparts.

In the final analysis, Commonwealth defence had come a long way between VJ Day and the outbreak of the Korean War. In terms of defence co-operation with the old dominions and the United States, Britain's position was more secure in mid 1950 than it had been at the end of 1945. In South Asia, Britain had reduced her own military commitments in a way that largely preserved her strategic interests and preserved her prestige. Progress in integrating the colonial empire into Commonwealth defence had also been made. While circumstances in the Middle East remained difficult, British policy makers were ever

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3. Foreign Relations of the United States, 1950, Vol. III, (Washington, 1977), p. 1689.

hopeful like Mr. Micawber that something would turn up. The Chiefs of Staff well remembered that Mussolini's invasion of Ethiopia had done a great deal to accommodate Egyptian nationalism to the Anglo/Egyptian Treaty of 1936.

The *raison d'etre* of Commonwealth defence had been to provide an environment that would support Britain's economic recovery. By the first half of 1950 that also had been achieved. For the whole year exports were up sixty percent over 1947 and the balance of payments surplus was large enough for Britain to be the first country to renounce Marshall aid at the end of the year.

That problems for Commonwealth defence still existed should not mask the achievements of Attlee and the Chiefs of Staff in attempting to create a viable global security system conducive to British interests. What ultimately happened to that system can only be answered by an indepth study of the records for the 1950s.

## Appendix I

### Chiefs of Staff Committee Meetings of 19 February 1947

It appears that the Chiefs of Staff met four times on 19 February 1947. The first meeting took place at 1050 and was a special meeting called by Alexander. The second meeting took place at 1100 and was the regularly scheduled meeting of the Chiefs of Staff. At 1600, the Chiefs of Staff attended a Staff Conference with Attlee and around 1700 another Staff Conference was held with a different set of ministers.

The records in the Public Record Office, COS(47)28th Meeting and 29th Meeting, reflect the meetings that took place at 1100 and 1600 on 19 February. Both records appear not to have been censored when they were opened for public inspection (ie. no blank spaces, no missing paragraph or page numbers and with proper openings and closings).<sup>1</sup> Alexander is not listed as being in attendance at the 1100 meeting and the only mention of India is the withdrawal of Force 409 (Indian Forces) from south Persia. At the 1600 Staff Conference Attlee, Bevin, Alexander, Tedder, John Cunningham, Simpson and Sir John Stephenson of the Dominions Office were the participants and the topics discussed were the "Combined Chiefs of Staff" and "Standardisation" (of weapons with Canada and the U.S.).

Evidence of the 1050 meeting can be found in the footnote of the minute from Stapleton to Alexander in T.O.P., Vol IX, No. 432, pp.

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1. All Chiefs of Staff minutes and memoranda as well as JPS reports after 1947 in the Public Record Office are bound photocopies and not originals.

766. The T.O.P. editors apparently saw a different set of minutes to COS(47)28th Meeting than those in the Public Record Office, but give no reference for these minutes. The T.O.P. reference for Stapleton's minute to Alexander is to records retained by the Cabinet Office.

The evidence for the 1700 meeting is Warner's account in Auchinleck. Warner's source was Lieutenant General Sir Frank Simpson. In a personal interview on 2 July 1985, General Simpson confirmed the accuracy of Warner's account, but said that he had estimated the time of the evening meeting at 1700.

Corroborating Simpson's account, the telegram he sent to Montgomery reporting his conversation with Auchinleck in India described by Warner on pages 274-6 of Auchinleck can be found in the Public Record Office in WO 216/786, telegram Black Four, personal and private for CIGS from VCIGS. In his journal Wavell reports sending home a summary of Burrow's appreciation on 15 February which Warner describes on pages 276-7.<sup>2</sup>

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2. Penderel Moon, ed., Wavell: The Viceroy's Journal, (London, 1973).

## Appendix II

### DO(47)44 "Future Defence Policy"

All versions of this paper, JP(47)55, COS(47)102(0) and DO(47)44 are withheld in DEFE 6/2, DEFE 5/4 and CAB 131/4 respectively. A copy is, however, available in an appendix 7 of Julian Lewis's thesis "British Military Planning for Post-War Strategic Defence, 1942-1947". Lewis's thesis contains a large number of sources that are listed either as "retained documents" or "special access". Retained documents are ones that he gained access to, but for which he does not reveal his actual source. Special access documents are those that he was allowed to see by the Cabinet Office or Ministry of Defence that are otherwise withheld from public inspection. His thesis was subsequently vetted by the Ministry of Defence before it was opened to the public.

The Staff Conference that approved DO(47)44 was COS(47)74th Meeting, Minute 1. Lewis had access to this meeting as a "retained document". Based upon the minutes of this meeting and three subsequent minutes by Attlee to the service ministers, he takes Margaret Gowing<sup>1</sup> to task for minimizing the importance of DO(47)44 and saying that it was never given official sanction. Lewis is right in his assessment of the importance of this paper. Because of its importance, he used it as the capstone of his thesis. DO(47)44's central role will be evident in my subsequent discussion. It became the basis for all British strategic planning until it was superseded

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1. Margaret Gowing, Independence and Deterrence: Britain and Atomic Energy, 1945-1953. Vol. I, Policy Making, (London, 1974), pp. 186-7.

by a new policy statement just one month before the outbreak of the Korean War.

The minutes by Attlee to the service ministers<sup>2</sup> read as follows:

I think you should be aware of the views expressed in the attached two documents,<sup>3</sup> which speak for themselves.

2. I must point out to you that the circulation of these papers has been confined to the Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Minister of Defence, the Chiefs of Staff and myself. The papers are passed to you on a strictly personal basis and no circulation whatever should be made with your department.

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2. M274/47, Attlee to Secretary of State for Air, M275/47, Attlee to Secretary of State for War and M276/47, Attlee to First Lord of the Admiralty all dated 8 July 1947, CAB 21/2278.

3. DO(47)44 attached to COS(47)74. These were the two documents discussed at COS(47)74th Mtg, Min 1.

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